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WHEN LONDON SLEEPS

A NOVELIZATION OF THE HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL DRAMA
BY

CHARLES DARRELL

PRODUCED AND NOW BEING PRESENTED THROUGHOUT
THE COUNTRY BY

JAS. H. WALLICK Esq.

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WHEN LONDON SLEEPS.

Thronged the city, thousands passing
Down its noblest thoroughfare,
Rothschilds with their millions massing,
Elbowing want and grim despair.
Silks and satins, ragged and anguished,
A scream of mirth, a heart that aches,
Rogues triumphant, honesty vanquished,
All hurry and strife while London wakes.

But when Big Ben, with solemn pealing,
Proclaims its dreadful night has come,
Fighting, cursing, killing, stealing
Swarms brass-browed shame, the city's scum.
Swells and women, singing, talking,
Through the shadows a burglar creeps,
A scream of "Fire!" Gaunt murder stalking,
Vice rules supreme when London sleeps.

—*Charles Darrell.*

WHILE LONDON SLEEPS.

CHAPTER I.

THE WHITE QUEEN OF THE SLACK WIRE.

Amid the crash of music and glare of lights, enters the leading lady of the show.

As to her beauty, there could scarcely be any diversity of opinion. From the crown of her well-shaped, rather haughtily poised head to the sole of her dainty foot, Queenie Carruthers, or, as she was better known, "The White Queen of the Slack Wire," was a rarely lovely girl. Masses of golden hair grew low in soft waves over a broad forehead, while from beneath delicately marked brows looked out a pair of dark blue eyes that had in them all the innocence and candor of a child, and yet beamed with more than ordinary intelligence. The contour of her face was oval, and about her sweet mouth lingered that expression of spirituality which the old painters have given to the Madonna.

It is not strange, therefore, that, when she appeared in the ring, clothed, as was her invariable custom when performing, all in white without a touch of color, that every woman in the audience should become her admirer and every man her lover.

In spite of the fact that from a child she had

known no other home than the circus, which is far from being the best school in which to bring up a young girl, no breath of scandal had ever touched the White Queen's name. Even had it done so, one look into that pure face would have caused any discriminating observer to reject the tale as false.

Both the young athlete, who, night after night watched her daring performance upon the wire with his whole soul in his gray eyes, and the stern-visaged, beetle-browed man, who had once come to the circus, out of a curiosity he despised, but could not resist, and wholly prejudiced, had reached the same conclusion in almost the same words:

"That is a good girl if there ever was one."

And this opinion would have been emphatically coincided in by those who knew her well and had been her daily companions for years.

The story of Queenie Carruthers' origin and how she had come to be a performer in a circus, is a strange and sad one.

One day there came to Signor Roberto Jonesio, otherwise plain Bob Jones, proprietor of the Grand Cosmopolitan Circus, a woman with a sweet, sad face, dressed in widow's weeds and with a tiny six month's old baby pressed to her heart. To the signor and his big-hearted wife, she told a sorrowful story.

She had been a trick rider, when she attracted the attention of a rich and well-born gentleman, who made her acquaintance, won her love and finally married her. This union turned out to be of the happiest for both the participants, but alas, their bliss proved to be but short-lived. The husband died soon

after the birth of a little girl. The family of Mr. Carruthers, for this was his name, had never forgiven him for marrying a circus rider, and, after his death, they entirely ignored her and refused her the slightest help.

Forced to support herself and her child, the young widow sought to return to the ring again.

Signor Jonesio gave her an engagement at a stipend which was not large, but sufficient for her modest wants.

Under her former circus name, Mrs. Carruthers, "as sweet and gentle a creature as Heaven ever permitted to suffer," as the manager's garrulous wife was never tired of declaring, worked bravely on, striving to forget her grief in her love and care for her little one. But it was plain to be seen that her heart was fast breaking to join the dear one who had gone before, and just when little Queenie was able to lisp a childish prayer at her knee, the poor woman laid down her cross, and went to the land to which her beloved husband had preceded her.

Signor Jonesio, to give him his self-assumed title, of which he was inordinately proud, wrote to Mr. Carruthers' brother, a rich banker in the city, telling him of the whereabouts of his little niece, and asking what his pleasure was concerning her.

But no answer was ever returned to this missive.

Then the Signora Jonesio, who would have much preferred to be called Mrs. Jones, took the poor, rejected little waif to her motherly heart and from that day on made no difference between her and her own daughter.

Day by day Queenie grew in beauty and intelligence. Fortunately for her, one of the ticket takers at the circus was a broken-down gentleman, a graduate of Oxford, whom family reverses and a too-frequent indulgence in the flowing bowl had brought to his present sad condition. But, in spite of his faults, he was a kindly old soul. He took a great fancy to the beautiful child and devoted all his leisure to her education, so that it happened at the time of his death, when Queenie was sixteen, she was possessed of better and more solid information than many a girl of her age.

Meanwhile, probably because it had been the profession of her mother, whose memory she worshipped, she took the greatest interest in all that appertained to the circus, and, when her friend and tutor died, she was a capital rider and an expert performer on the slack wire.

The affairs of the Jonesios were then at rather a low ebb. Business had not been good, and the prospects for the future were of a decidedly cerulean hue.

Then Queenie announced her determination to appear in a professional capacity.

"I cannot be a burden upon you any longer," she said. "I am able now to make my own living and to help you."

"Nonsense, dear!" sputtered the signora, indignantly. "You've repaid us a hundred times by the sunshine you've brought into our lives."

"And what have you been to me?" replied Queenie, tears of affection and gratitude starting to

her eyes. "What would have become of me if it had not been for you? Ah, Heaven has indeed been kind to me. In depriving me of one mother, it gave me another."

The signora—(no, we will not call her that any more, but by the homely name which is far more suitable to her)—Mrs. Jones, then—did her best to persuade the young girl to abandon her intention, but Queenie, who was possessed of considerable firmness when once her mind was made up, persisted, and finally won her point.

This result caused unmixed delight to the manager, who, though by no means a bad fellow, was far from being so unselfish as his wife. He saw a chance of replenishing his depleted coffers, and at once set to work to perfect Queenie's circus education.

First, however, he wrote again to Banker Carruthers, telling him of Queenie's intention to enter the ring. This letter met with no better fate than that of half a score of years before.

In due time "The White Queen of the Slack Wire," by which title it was decided that Queenie should be known to the public, made her debut, and it proved more successful even than their most sanguine hopes.

Accustomed as she had been from childhood to the more or less perilous feats which she attempted, she was absolutely without fear, and this, combined with her remarkable beauty of face and figure, made her a pronounced favorite from the first.

Business at once improved materially, and little by little, the Grand Cosmopolitan Circus, which had

sunk to a show of which even the manager himself was ashamed, began to assume something of its former magnificence.

A few of the old performers were retained, and among them of course the Jonesio's daughter, a pretty girl of eighteen or nineteen, who, moreover, was a rider of no mean ability.

A great many new ones, however, were engaged, and among them two artists of the first order, who, as they are destined to play important parts in this story, deserve some description.

Place aux dames!

Miss Hilda Corrode performed what is known in circus parlance as the "manege act"; that is, instead of appearing in short gauze skirts, plentifully bespangled, leaping over bars and through hoops, or plunging wildly round the ring standing erect upon a "fiery, untamed steed," she appeared in an irreproachable riding habit, gloves, high hat and all, and gave an imitation of a lady in the hunting field, including the leaping of five-barred gates. Miss Corrode was a strikingly handsome woman of the Italian type of beauty, purple-black hair, large dark eyes, and a brilliant color. She was not precisely in her first youth, being in the neighborhood of twenty-eight, and she gave one the impression of a woman who had been through numerous experiences and thoroughly knew life in its various phases. To her associates she was haughty and domineering, and her temper was such that few cared to arouse it.

The other artist to whom we have alluded was a young man of about thirty, David Engleheart by

name. He was a handsome fellow, of superb physique, with muscles of steel, and not an ounce of superfluous flesh upon his lithe, graceful figure. His specialty was the flying trapeze, and there were few who could equal him in his dangerous feats. He was something of a mystery in the company, as, though invariably courteous to all, he was inclined to hold himself somewhat aloof, and was a man of rather more than ordinary refinement and cultivation, which is not the case with the usual run of acrobats.

He it was whose gray eyes were accustomed to follow Queenie night after night during her performance, a fact which had not passed unnoticed by the object of the gaze herself, nor by one or two others, who were affected by it more or less profoundly.

But, in spite of these new acquisitions, "The White Queen of the Slack Wire" still remained the bright particular star of Jonesio's Grand Cosmopolitan Circus.

CHAPTER II.

THE BOUNDING BROTHERS.

And now that the principal performers are known, we will introduce the reader into the side tent, a sort of green room of the circus, a favor which we trust will be fully appreciated, as the portly Mrs. Jones is always on guard there during the hours of performance, ready to repel vigorously any importunate intruder.

It is an odd place, with its canvas walls covered with files of bills and posters, and with banners, flags, hoops and the general paraphernalia of the ring scattered about in picturesque confusion. A couple of naptha lamps hung from the roof dimly illumine the place, save at one end where a flood of light pours in through an archway hung with draperies of the most brilliant colors. This is the entrance to the ring. There are two other openings to the tent, one leading to the dressing rooms, and the other to the stables.

A strong odor of tanbark pervades the whole structure.

When we first enter this holy of holies, its presiding genius, the ubiquitous Mrs. Jones, is there, standing, screened by the draperies, gazing smilingly out into the performance tent, which is ringing with applause.

The worthy woman has good reason to feel

pleased, for the house is a fair one, and her daughter has met with considerable success to-night.

As she stands there, her husband dressed in the uniform of a ring-master, appears, leading a high-stepping, dappled horse, upon the back of which is seated a pretty, bright-faced girl, in voluminous skirts and low-necked, short-sleeved bodice of pink tulle.

"Bravo! bravo! my dear!" exclaimed the proud father as he assisted his daughter to alight, and with a chirp started the horse off toward the stable "Bravissimo, as they say in my native Italy. You've knocked 'em sky-high. A leetle more dash, a few more tips from yours truly, and you'll find yourself at the Paris Hippodrome, my love."

"Oh, pa, how you talk!" cried Carrie, laughing and blushing, as she hurried off to the dressing tent.

"How's the house, Bob?" asked Mrs. Jones, practically, as she came forward to his side.

"Might be worse, mother. But we'll have a big house for Queenie's benefit Friday. Multo! Multo largissimo, as they say in my native Italy."

Mrs. Jones laughed a little impatiently. She never did have much sympathy with her husband's pretensions to foreign birth.

"For goodness' sake, Bob," she said, deprecatingly, but not ill-naturedly, "drop that when you're in the bosom of your family. You don't suppose that changing your name from plain Robert Jones to Signor Roberto Jonesio will change your nationality, do you?"

"I ain't such a fool as that," acknowledged the manager, with no less good humor.

In fact, no matter how he might swear and scold at his employees, he was never known to be out of temper with his better half. It was whispered about the circus that this was because she was decidedly the stronger of the two, but this insinuation may be safely looked upon as a malicious slander.

"But I do know," he continued, "that talent in England is no good without a foreign name tacked to it."

"Well, Bob, you may put as many O's and IO's to yours as you please, but no one will ever mistake you for a foreigner. There's London written on every line of your face, and the Whitechapel cockney sounds in every word that falls from your blessed lips."

This sort of talk was quite familiar to Jones—we beg his pardon, Jonesio—and he was not in the least offended.

"Well, mother," he ejaculated, "I always said, and always will maintain, that you're the best woman to take the conceit out of a bloke I ever knew. If he——"

He broke off short, interrupting himself, as he saw several of the stable hands in the doorway, snickering to themselves at what they would have termed a dressing-down from the missus.

This was more than flesh and blood could bear, and Jonesio snapped his whip at them, ordering them to be off, declaring that he would not stand any of their impudence any way.

He was obeyed without a murmur, for, in spite of their master's occasional outbreaks, they had a good position, and they knew it.

"Codding their manager!" exclaimed Jonesio, turning irritably to his wife. "What's the profession coming to?"

Mrs. Jones, who was essentially a peacemaker, made no reply to this, but instead, asked another question.

"What's on in the ring?"

"The Bounding Brothers of Breathless Space are just giving their Marvelous Manifestations of Manly Muscularity," replied Jonesio, pompously.

He was something of a Barnum in his small way, and he had become so accustomed to gull the public with high sounding phrases that he never could quite rid himself of making use of them even when there was not the slightest necessity for it.

Mrs. Jones sighed, and glanced toward the brightly lighted opening, with a certain look of worry upon her round, still comely face.

"Poor Sammy!" she ejaculated. "I wonder how he'll get on with the Italian. It's his first trial in the tumbling business."

There was a fire in Signor Jonesio's eyes which boded ill for "poor Sammy" if anything should chance to go wrong, and, when he spoke, his words accorded with his expression.

"If Mr. Samuel Blyth doesn't smarten up a bit, he and yours truly will have to bid each other O, river, as they say in my native Italy. He makes a mess of everything he goes in for. Why don't he write to his

governor in the city, and ask for his old seat on the office stool again?"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth, when there came a loud crash from the ring, accompanied by a howl of pain. This was immediately followed by hissings and hootings from the audience.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Jones, turning pale. "What's that?"

"I told you so!" ejaculated her husband. "One of the Bounding Brothers of Breathless Space has come a cropper."

And he hurried forward to see what was the matter, but, before he could reach the entrance to the ring, a most pitiable object came stumbling through the curtains.

This object was a young man in acrobat's dress, covered with dirt and bleeding profusely at the nose.

And here it just occurs to us that we owe Mr. Samuel Blythe an apology. In our enumeration of the talent attached to the Grand Cosmopolitan Circus, we have entirely overlooked one, who, in his own opinion at least, was one of its shining lights. But it is not too late yet. He shall receive ample amends.

Mr. Samuel Blythe was formerly a junior clerk in an office in the city. In an evil hour, or a fortunate one, just as you choose to consider it, he went to Ramsgate to spend his holidays, and Signor Jonesio's circus happened to be pitched just then at that famous seaside resort. Of course Samuel, or, as he was known to his intimates, Sammy, attended the

show, and before it was half over had promptly and irretrievably fallen in love.

As he expressed it afterward to the object of his infatuation:

"Oh! Carrie! Carrie! Never shall I forget how at the first sight of you as you bounded into the ring, my heart leaped up into my mouth. I swallowed my heart again, but I had no right to, for it was no longer mine. And then, as I saw you bounding over banners and jumping through paper hoops, I could contain myself no longer, and I cried out: 'I love her! I love her! She must and shall be mine!' Then everybody called out 'Rats!' and I got chucked out."

"And served you right for making such an idiot of yourself," was Carrie's unfeeling response.

However, his treatment at the circus, when his feelings got so much the better of him, did not dampen the love-lorn Sammy's ardor. The next day he wrote to Signor Jonesio, asking for an engagement, and inclosing a photograph, which, by some inadvertancy, happened to be that of Sandow.

Jonesio granted him an interview, and it is easier to imagine than describe the disappointment and disgust of that worthy impressario when he saw the undersized and by no means muscular Mr. Samuel Blythe.

It might have fared badly with the adventurous youth had not Carrie happened to be present, and, moved by pity, had pleaded with her father to give him a trial. She had of course been a witness of the scene the night before, and knew its cause, and per-

haps this had something to do with her intercession, for no woman can help but take some interest, however slight it may be, in the man whom she has inspired with a passionate admiration.

However this may be, Jonesio, who could rarely refuse his daughter anything, at last consented and gave Sammy a position at a nominal salary.

It is needless to say that pretty Carrie became more than ever the star of the foolish youth's adoration.

But, in the pursuit of the new profession he had adopted, things did not go well with him. He was physically unsuited to be an athlete, and now the first time he was called upon to take a part of any prominence owing to the illness of one of the performers, he had failed shamefully and ignominiously.

"What's all this?" exclaimed Jones, wrathfully, as Sammy entered the side tent.

The dilapidated youth wiped the blood from his face, and answered dolefully:

"Ask that miserable peanut merchant you sent me in with. Look at my nose!"

"My poor lad, did you tumble?" asked Mrs. Jones, compassionately, her big heart making her forget all other consideration.

"Tumble! That infernal hokey-pokey foreigner let me shoot through the air until I thought I should never reach earth again without seeing my latter end."

"Poor boy! You are in a state! I'll go and get you some warm water and sticking plaster. Now, don't scold him too much, Bob! Mind that!"

And the good woman hurried away on charitable thoughts intent.

But, in spite of his wife's injunction, Jonesio could not quite restrain his righteous indignation.

"You're a nice chap to give away a respectable traveling circus!" he exclaimed, disgustedly. "There ain't been a blessed thing you've gone in for that ain't got the goose."

As if in answer to his words, the sound of the bird to which he referred again rose from the performance tent, and with a smothered oath the manager hurried way to quell the displeasure of the audience with one of those wheedling speeches at which long experience had made him an adept.

As he passed through the entrance, he nearly collided with an individual who rushed past him.

The new-comer was a thin, swarthy Italian acrobat. He was evidently in great excitement and gesticulating violently, as indeed he had reason to do, for he was none other than Signor Stefano Mordicano, Sammy's recent unfortunate partner, the other Boneless Brother.

Meanwhile Sammy had seated himself upon a big drum, and was dejectedly attempting to stanch the blood which was flowing from his injured nose.

The instant the Italian caught sight of him, he rushed frantically toward him.

"Ah, it ees you!" he cried in a shrill falsetto, thrusting out his fingers almost into Sammy's face. "It ees you who haf insult me, you, who haf got me, Stefano Mordicano the—vat you call hees."

Now Sammy, whatever his physical disabilities

might be, was no coward, and he promptly struck away the Italian's hand, at the same time rising to his feet.

"Don't stick your finger in my eye!" he commanded, wrathfully. "What d'ye mean? Got you the hees? Look what you've got me, my nose run all over my face, and my manly beauty spoilt forever."

Beside himself with rage, Mordicano hissed:

"I vill have vat you call ze satisfaction! You shall fight me."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" retorted Sammy, disdainfully.

"No, sare, I vill not eat coke! You get me ze hees! You make ze people laugh at me! me Stefano Mordicano, and I vill have your blood!"

And, half crazy with passion, the Italian commenced to dance about in the most absurd and yet threatening manner possible.

"Oh, viil you have blood?" repeated Sammy, imitating him impudently. "How will you get it? Well, you've had enough of mine to-night already. I've only got a few drops left, and them I'm going to keep to myself."

"No! no!" shrieked Mordicano so loudly that it is a wonder his voice was not heard in the ring above the blare of the brass band which had begun to play again. "I vill kill you! You got me the hees, you shall die!"

Sammy made a gesture of contempt, more expressive than refined.

"Oh, go away, little boy, go and play!"

"No, I vill not play. I know not how. I not do anything till you fight me. What are your weapons, sare?"

Sammy calmly clinched his fists and raised them in approved pugilistic attitude.

"Oh, my dooks are good enough for me."

"Ah! anozer insult! Sare, I fight with stilettoes!"

Sammy was heartily weary of all this business, and was beginning to lose his temper as well. There was lots of grit in the little fellow, and he was not in the least afraid of the Italian, or alarmed at his bloodthirsty propositions.

"Oh, you do?" he retorted, tauntingly. "Well, I'm not taking any. You see, in my country, we don't wait round dark corners with a big hat and a long cloak so nobody shall know us, and then, when our enemy's back's turned, give him a few inches of cold steel. We stand up, face to face, and use our fists," putting the action into words so far as he could by himself. "And when one of us has got a jolly good hiding, we shake hands and try to be friends once more."

But this was a style of fighting which the Italian did not understand in the least, and it is more than doubtful if he would have stood up to a square bout with the naked fists.

"Gentlemen no fight that-a way!" he exclaimed, with a fine show of scorn. "Me, Stefano Mordicane! Me! Nevare! You get me the hees! I kill you, you Anglish pig!"

This epithet was too much for Sammy, and he determined not to delay much longer before proceed-

ing to hostilities. But he would give his tormentor just one more warning.

"Now look here, Count Macaroni," he cried, so fiercely that the Italian jumped back, "I've stood your blooming cheek long enough, and, if you won't shut your jaw, I'll shut your eyes, and so alter the shape of your ugly phiz that when you go back with your peanut barrow your dear mamma won't know her Stefano Mordicano, Lord knows what O."

With a growl, Mordicano made toward the dressing tent, hissing something about a stiletto.

"No, you don't!" shouted Sammy, jumping in front of him and squaring off excitedly.

It is doubtful how the thing would have ended, had not a third person just at that juncture appeared upon the scene.

CHAPTER III.

A BIT OF A COQUETTE.

This third person was Miss Carrie Jones, who came from the dressing tent. She had changed her circus costume, and was now arrayed in a neat gown of gray, looking, if anything, prettier than she had in her gauze and tinsel.

"Whatever is the matter?" she exclaimed, pushing Sammy aside and stepping between him and the man he was trying to force to be his combatant.

Then, as she caught sight of his damaged countenance, she burst into an irrepressible and hearty peal of laughter.

Sammy looked at her in a manner that was meant to be reproachful, but was simply comical, and only served to increase her merriment.

Then the Italian joined in.

"Ha! ha! ha!" he chuckled, provokingly. "The beautiful signorina, she laugh at you, at your ugly face. I too laugh! Ha! ha! ha!"

Exasperated beyond measure, Sammy again squared off at him.

"Laugh at me, you saffron-colored moocher!" he began, threateningly. "I'll——"

But Carrie again put a stop to the contemplated hostilities.

"No, Sammy Blythe," she interrupted, with a commanding gesture, "you shan't strike him. Remember, he's only a poor foreigner."

The wound to Sammy's vanity was considerably eased by these last words, which seemed to place him on a superior plane to the other. He lowered his arm, but, nevertheless, he could not refrain from saying, with a scowl at Mordicano:

"Well, then, don't let him be so blooming impudent. We English stand a lot if sauce from these poor foreigners, as you call them, for a time, but when it gets a bit too thick, and they see they've trod upon the lion's tail, they're precious quick in scuttling back to their burrows again. You've had my ultimatum, Mr. Hurdy Gurdy, and don't you forget it!"

But Mordicano was scarcely listening to him. He was too occupied in gazing at Carrie, whose pretty face had long ago made an impression upon his susceptible nature.

"Ah, adorable mees!" he exclaimed with an extravagance of admiration which made Sammy grind his teeth with rage. "You plead for the poor foreigner! The Italiano kneels to you, and worships your goodness and beauty."

"Here," interrupted Sammy, touching Carrie imploringly upon the arm, "do you allow it to cackle to you like that?"

Carrie looked from one to the other with a little smile upon her lips. It must be confessed that the fair Miss Jones was just a bit of a coquette.

"Well," she said at last, very demurely, "why

not? I'm sure he's very much in earnest, and not at all bad-looking."

The Italian clasped his hands in ecstasy, which made Sammy fairly snort with disgust.

"Well, of course," he said, with an elaborate attempt at withering satire, "of course, beauty is a matter of taste, as the old woman said, but if I had a face like that, I'd take it out on the road and break stones with it."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Carrie, delighting in her power to tease him. "Look at the color of your own."

This was rather hard, and Sammy felt it to be so, but Mordicano of course was overjoyed.

"'Tis well!" he exclaimed, exultantly. "You turn from him with his nose like von butcher's shop. Ah! angel!" turning again to hyperbole, "I love you, I adore you! Fly with me to Sunny Italy! There we will go hand in hand through orange groves, and I will worship you by the blue ocean of my dear native country."

This was altogether too much for Sammy. What, would he allow this miserable foreigner to make love before his eyes to the girl for whose sake he himself had sacrificed everything? Never in the world!

Sneaking round behind Carrie, he suddenly seized Mordicano by the collar and swung him round with all his strength. Then, in spite of his struggles, he held him until he had had his say.

"Now look here, you've tired me out. I forgive you damaging my beauty and spoiling my clothes, but when you make love to my best girl, my cock-

ney blood can stand no more! So, in the language of Yankee land, git!"

And with this he gave him a thrust, and no gentle one at that, which sent him flying headlong toward the dressing tent.

Fairly foaming at the mouth, the Italian gathered himself together, and, turning about, faced his assailant, although still at a safe distance from him.

"Oh, do not! do not!" pleaded Carrie, now alarmed, and turning first to the one and then to the other. "Go, Signor Mordicano, go!"

"Git!" repeated Sammy, tersely.

"I obey your wishes, signorina," said the Italian, turning upon his heel and vanishing.

To tell the truth, he was only too glad to escape so easily, but he went, swearing vengeance in his heart.

Carrie turned toward Sammy and smiled. She had never respected the homely little fellow so much in her life. There is nothing a woman admires so much in the opposite sex as physical bravery, and, per contra, nothing she despises so much as cowardice. No intellectual attainments in the world will make up for the latter.

"So perish the foreign invader who would undersell British talent!" exclaimed Sammy, melodramatically, striking an attitude.

The pretty girl by his side laughed.

"You're a nice one to talk about talent!" she retorted. "Who ever told you that you were an athlete?"

Sammy looked ruefully down over his torn and dirty garments.

"All my pals in the office where I was clerk," he replied, shamefacedly. "I begin to think now they were codding me; but I shall have to stick it out as long as it sticks to me, for my old employer will never take me back now. Besides, you know very well that it wasn't only the glitter of the ring that drew me here."

Carrie understood perfectly well what he meant, but still she preferred to affect unconsciousness.

"What was it then, Sammy?" she asked, opening her eyes wide in pretended wonder.

Sammy drew a little nearer to her.

"Oh, Carrie, how can you ask?" he exclaimed, reproachfully. "Of course, it was you!"

"Dear me!"

Carrie turned upon him a look which would certainly have emboldened him to a still more ardent declaration, but unfortunately, before he could proceed further, both the manager and Mrs. Jones came into the tent, the former from the ring, where he had been superintending the performance of Prince Hafiz Surga, alias Fitzsimmons, in his peerless pirouettes and postures upon the enchanted ball; and the latter from the dressing rooms with a towel, a basin of hot water, and a piece of sticking plaster in her hands.

Jonesio was in high good humor, and had evidently forgotten the contretemps of the Bounding Brothers.

"The house has picked up wonderfully, mother," he said, "at half time. They know our Queenie don't appear till late, so they hang back. It's a mistake. We'll have to give her an earlier turn."

"Bless her!" replied Mrs. Jones, fervently. "I don't know how the circus would get on without her. What's on now?"

"Ten minutes interval."

Mrs. Jones turned toward Sammy with as severe an expression as her pleasant face could assume. His attentions to Carrie had not escaped her, and she was not pleased with them, for she looked much higher for her daughter, which was only natural.

"Here, Sammy," she said, coldly, "when you've done with our Carrie, perhaps you'll go to your dressing tent and wash your face. Here's some hot water and a bit of plaster for you."

Sammy took the articles and was about to move off when Jonesio called to him.

"Hurry up, Blythe. Funny Freddie has got too much booze again, and you'll have to clown it for Miss Corrode."

Sammy shivered. He felt that he had had quite enough experience of the ring for one evening.

"I don't know anything about clowning," he said, sulkily. "Never clowned in my life."

"Oh, be just as funny as you are when you try to be a graceful athlete," said Jonesio, cheerfully, "and the audience will die of laughing."

"Thanks. Sorry I don't suit."

He looked so woe-begone that Carrie took pity upon him.

"Never mind, Sammy," she said, kindly. "Give me the basin, and I'll wash your face for you and give you one or two tips at the same time."

As she spoke, she took the basin from him, and led him away to a remote corner of the tent, where they would be out of the way of the artists who were beginning to arrive in time for the second part of the programme. Mrs. Jones followed them with a rather anxious eye. She was beginning to ask herself if Carrie could care anything for that insignificant little fellow, but she was a woman wise in her generation, and she did not speak. She knew that there was nothing so potent as opposition to bring into flower a budding love.

Carrie made Sammy sit down upon a heap of carpets, and then proceeded to carry her promise into operation. Soon his besmeared face was quite presentable, and he looked more like his former self.

"Thank you, Carrie. You're very good to me," he said, gratefully. "In fact, you're all of you good to me. Somehow, your father seems to stick to me, although I expect every Saturday to get the bounce. But," with sudden determination, "I don't mind what I go through, Carrie, if only you'll care for me a little."

"What on earth's the use of talking about that?" responded Carrie, blushing a little in spite of herself. And then, moved by the spirit of mischief which was inherent in her, she added, with a sly glance to mark the effect of her words: "If you were only like Dave Engleheart now!"

But in this case she was out of her reckoning.

David Engleheart was the one man she could not make Sammy jealous of. The handsome young athlete had been the only man in the whole show to speak an encouraging word and lend a helping hand to the awkward young amateur; and Sammy Blythe, full of faults though he may have been, possessed that rarest of all virtues—gratitude.

"Ah, I shall never be like that, Carrie," he answered regretfully, but with no tinge of envy. "He's one in a thousand, is good old Dave. As brave as a lion, as gentle as a lamb, and one of the whitest men it's ever been my luck to know. I'd go through fire and water for him!"

Carrie was touched. She liked this loyalty in Sammy, but still she could not resist the temptation to make a further attempt at teasing him.

"Yes, Sammy," she assented. "And doesn't the name they call him seem just to suit him? The Star of the Air! As he flies through space, he looks just like one of those marble demigods you see at the Crystal Palace."

Sammy was silent for a moment, and then he said sadly and disconsolately:

"Sometimes I think I'm a fool for making up to you. As though I should have an earthly chance beside him."

Carrie shook her brown curls as if to say that he certainly would not. But then she took pity upon him, and remarked in a tone in which there was a certain note of encouragement.

"You see, unfortunately, some of us poor women

have very bad taste, and lose our hearts to undersized little monkeys."

Poor Sammy did not know whether to feel pleased or not. She seemed to imply that she might care for him, but yet she characterized him as an undersized little monkey.

"Thanks. Sorry I don't suit," he said at last, lamely, falling back upon the phrase which was a part of his stock in trade.

"Besides," suggested Carrie, "there's no hope for me so far as Dave Engleheart is concerned. There's some one else."

"Yes, I know," answered Sammy, quickly. "And isn't she mashed!"

Carrie flashed upon him an indignant glance.

"Nothing of the kind!" she replied, quick to defend one of her own sex, at least one whom she cared for. "She has too much good sense to let everybody read her heart. We two girls have been together all our lives, and I love her as a sister."

Sammy looked up in boundless surprise.

"What! Hilda Corrode?" he exclaimed.

"Hilda Corrode!" in tones of scorn. "Certainly not! I detest Hilda Corrode! I mean my beautiful Queenie, of course."

Sammy gave vent to a low whistle.

"What! is she spoons on him, too? Oh, Christopher Columbus!"

"Don't be vulgar!" reproved Carrie, severely. She paused a moment, and then went on in an entirely different tone: "It will grieve me to part

with my dear little playmate, but Dave is a good man and will make her a happy woman."

"But haven't you noticed that Hilda Corrode is gone on him, too?" ventured Sammy.

It was Carrie's turn to be surprised.

"Good gracious, no!" she exclaimed.

"Well, you must be blind! Why, her eyes are bursting out of her head with it. She follows him like his shadow, and is as eager for a look or a kind word as a dog for a bone."

Like a flash Carrie reviewed what had passed under her eyes, but what she had never put the right interpretation upon. She realized that Sammy was right, and she wondered at her own blindness in not having discovered it for herself long before.

"Just you keep your eyes open, Carrie!" proceeded Sammy, impressively. "Mark my words! Before long there'll be an explosion in Signor Roberto Jonesio's Grand Cosmopolitan Circus!"

CHAPTER IV.

A WOMAN WITH A PAST.

"Oh, Queenie, you're a picture to-night!"

And Carrie clasped her hands ecstatically together as she gazed admiringly at her friend.

There was another, too, who was looking at the beautiful girl with something more than admiration in his gray eyes, for Dave Engleheart, dressed for his act, was waiting in his accustomed place close to the entrance.

The interval was nearly over, and it was almost time for the appearance of the White Queen of the Slack Wire.

Queenie had just entered the waiting tent, and she certainly deserved all the encomiums that Carrie or any one else could have lavished upon her.

She wore a new costume to-night, but as usual all white, satin and pearls. The bodice was high in the neck, but her beautiful arms were exposed in all their exquisite symmetry. The clothing of her nether limbs was as modest as possible where all superfluous drapery would have been dangerous.

In her bosom she wore a white rose, and another nestled in the coils of her golden hair. As Dave Engleheart noticed this his heart thrilled with delight, for the roses had been his gift.

"It's all right, mother, dear," said Queenie to Mrs. Jones, referring to her dress. "You've made it beautifully."

"Yes, I think it will do," remarked Mrs. Jones, after a critical survey of her handiwork. And then she kissed Queenie tenderly. "You know I always try to do something for you on this day. You remember what day it is?"

A shade of sadness stole over the lovely face.

"As if I could forget!" she said, a little reproachfully, and then added, reverently, "On this day fifteen years ago, my poor mother died."

"Fifteen years ago!" repeated Mrs. Jones, her thoughts reverting to the past. "How time does fly, to be sure?"

"Do you remember her, Queenie?" asked Carrie.

"Only very dimly. I was not four years old when she died, you know. But sometimes, when I dream, there smiles upon me a fair young face framed in a warm halo of red-gold hair. I feel her kiss upon my brow, and in my sleep I murmur, 'Mother!' But," turning affectionately to Mrs Jones, "when I awake I thank Heaven that I have you, and I bless you all for what you have done for me."

"Nonsense, Queenie, dear," protested Carrie, warmly. "Remember what you have done for us. Look what a favorite you are, and a big draw in every town we go to."

Mrs. Jones smiled acquiescence, but said, knowingly:

"Ah! but I'm afraid we shall be losing our little magnet soon."

"Losing me, mother!" exclaimed Queenie in surprise. "Why, what do you mean?"

Mrs. Jones glanced over toward where Dave Engleheart stood.

"Why, when a certain tall, fine young fellow claims a certain little White Queen for his wife, perhaps he'll take her far away from the old folks that love her so."

The color had mounted to Queenie's cheeks until she was blushing like a rose.

"Oh, mother," she murmured, "Mr. Engleheart has never said a word of such a thing!"

Mrs. Jones laughed, and her fat sides still shaking, walked over to the ring entrance.

"Wish I could say the same of my young man," said Carrie, half seriously, half humorously.

"Poor Sammy," rejoined Queenie, who really liked the little fellow, and who lately had a peculiar sympathy for any one genuinely in love. "Oh, Carrie, do be kind to him! I'm sure his heart's in the right place."

"That's more than can be said of his brains," said Carrie, with a greater show of contempt than she really felt.

"Queenie!" called Mrs. Jones, "that's the music for your turn. Come, dear."

Queenie hurried away, but just as she reached the entrance she paused a moment and looking up into the handsome, clear-cut face above her, said, softly:

"Thank you so much for the flowers!"

"And thank you for wearing them," he answered,

his eyes speaking all that his tongue had not yet uttered.

A thunderous burst of applause greeted the appearance of the popular favorite, and, after her graceful, daring performance she was recalled again and again.

At last the enthusiastic audience permitted her to retire to her dressing tent, but before she did so she found an opportunity to speak again to Dave, and to ask him to be careful. She knew he was doing a new feat that night in which there was considerable danger.

"Would you care," he asked, "if——"

She turned pale as the rose at her breast.

"Oh, hush! Do be careful! For—for my sake!"

"Have no fear!" he answered, with eyes agleam at this appeal, which was almost a confession. "When you say that, my arm is as iron, my nerve as steel."

The brief colloquy was interrupted by the appearance of Signor Jonesio from the ring, and Queenie hurried away to the dressing tent, not noticing as she passed through, the look of hatred bent upon her from the black eyes of a woman who was standing close to the entrance. Hilda Corrode had been watching, and had seen her speak to the "Star of the Air."

"It's Corrode's act next but one," said Jonesio, joining his wife and daughter. "Worse luck! I don't like the look of her to-night. Her first turn went bad. She's in the tantrums again, and when the wind blows that way, she don't care whether she

sticks on or falls off. By the way, where's Blythe? Oh, there he is."

This latter as Sammy entered, an absurd figure, his cheeks bedaubed with red and white paint, and his figure arrayed in a grotesque clown's suit miles too large for him, in which his arms and legs seemed absolutely lost. The poor fellow felt that he was playing in very hard luck, and indeed it seemed as if he were not far wrong. With a heart as full of romance as any poet's, he was doomed to make himself ridiculous.

"Ha! ha! ha!" mimicking savagely the burst of laughter with which he was greeted by the Jones family, including the object of his adoration. "Funny, isn't it? Sorry I don't suit."

"But, my lad, you do suit," chuckled Mrs. Jones. "Directly the audience see you, they'll die of laughing."'

"Well, I hope they will," groaned Sammy, "for I'm quite certain if I don't corpse them at first sight, they'll kill me when I try to be funny. Oh, dear, oh dear! I feel like one of the coves in Fox's Book of Blessed Martyrs going to be jugged under the jugular."

"Never mind, Sammy," said Carrie, her eyes dancing with merriment, "the hens are laying, eggs are cheap, so perhaps they'll throw 'em fresh."

This was the most unkind cut of all, and the clown, in spite of himself, was plunged into the very depths of woe. And his spirits were not raised by the appearance of a groom leading a horse with a lady's side saddle. It was Margery, the horse Miss

Corrode used in her manege act. It seemed to Sammy that the animal was more fiery than usual to-night, and that it glared at him as if threatening to do him some damage with its hoofs once it had him in the ring.

He was almost ready to turn tail and fly from it all when Carrie came to the rescue.

Taking him by the arm, she led him a little one side to give him the tips she had promised him, assuring him at the same time that she was sure he was a born comedian.

"Mother," said Jonesio, "just call Miss Corrode, will you? I want to have a parlez-vous with her, as they say in my native Italy."

A look of apprehension appeared upon Mrs. Jones' kind face. She did not particularly care for Miss Corrode, but she would have spared her any unpleasantness she could.

"Now, Bob," she said, laying her plump hand entreatingly upon his arm, "don't be harsh, because it don't become you. We all know she's a bit bad-tempered and occasionally sulky, but remember she's just been ill, and seems to have had a deal of trouble, young as she is."

"Leave it to me, mother," rejoined Jonesio, rather shortly. "Just call her."

Mrs. Jones went over to the dressing tent.

"Hilda, are you dressed?"

"Yes, Mrs. Jones," replied a clear, not unmusical voice. "Do you want me?"

"Father does. Come along, there's a dear."

In another moment Hilda Corrode emerged.

Although the rouge upon her cheeks was a little too thick, and the dark lines beneath her eyes a trifle too pronounced, she was looking very handsome in her perfectly-fitting habit of dark-blue cloth, the skirt of which she held gathered together in one hand.

She gave one quick glance toward Dave Engleheart, who still remained near the entrance of the ring, but the young athlete, absorbed in his own reflections, which must have been pleasant ones from the smile upon his lips, was not even aware of her appearance.

Then her eyes flashing angrily and her lips tightly compressed, she advanced with an easy swinging step toward her employer.

"You wish to speak to me?" she asked, curtly.

"Yes, Miss Corrode."

"Be as quick as you can, please."

Annoyed at her haughtiness, which was not far removed from insolence, Jonesio spoke more sharply than he had intended after his wife's remonstrance.

"Your act lately has been most slipshod and careless. You have ridden poor Margery as if you didn't care whether the tricks were done or not, and often but for the grooms you would have come a nasty cropper. You don't take any interest in your work, Miss Corrode, and, without that, your rein will become uncertain, your hand lose its cunning."

And, with a short bow, he walked away, without giving her any chance to reply.

She looked after him, her dark brows contracted gloomily.

"Your hand will lose its cunning," she repeated to herself.

Suppose he were right? What would the end be then?

She was roused by the touch of Mrs. Jones' hand upon her shoulder and the sound of Mrs. Jones' kind voice in her ear.

"Come, dear, don't be annoyed. He only speaks for your good."

Hilda shook off the hand impatiently.

"Oh, yes, I know," she said, bitterly. "I'm growing passe for the business now; I'm getting a back number. Just fancy, Mrs. Jones, only a few years ago, I was the admiration and toast of all the big cities on the Continent! There were none like brilliant, dashing Hilda Corrode!"

"Never mind, dear," said Mrs. Jones, kindly, feeling really sorry for the woman and attempting in her own homely way to console her. "We must all have our ups and downs. Why, look at me. I once rode barebacked before the Prince of Wales, and now, when I've got fat and my figure's gone, I have to be content with the old woman in the clown's comic sketches."

Hilda's lip curled. What cared she for Mrs. Jones' misfortunes? It was her own and her own alone that concerned her.

"I suppose, then," she said, coldly, "if I do not come up to your husband's standard of perfection he'll discharge me."

"Now, don't talk like that," said Mrs. Jones,

genuinely pained. "I was only saying to Queenie this morning——"

Hilda upreared her handsome head with a gesture of displeasure.

"I fail to see," she interrupted, haughtily, "how my affairs can interest Miss Carruthers."

Mrs. Jones, amiable soul though she was, was up in arms at once. She could not and would not bear any reflection upon her favorite. Besides, there were circumstances which made it particularly offensive in the present case, and these circumstances she did not hesitate to recall.

"Perhaps not," she answered, bridling in her indignation. "But when you were down with the fever, she nursed you night and day, didn't she? She did double duty in the ring, so that your engagement should be kept open for you, didn't she? And now you are strong again she seems to take a great deal more interest in your welfare than you do yourself."

All this was true, but they were facts which rankled in Miss Corrode's soul, facts she would have liked to forget, and it was excessively disagreeable to her to have them recalled in this blunt way. Still she restrained herself and answered chillingly:

"I am very much obliged to Miss Carruthers. I have thanked her."

"Our Queenie wants no thanks," retorted Mrs. Jones, sharply. "Her reward will be in seeing you take an interest in your work and be kind to those about you!"

And, her patience exhausted, the good woman

wheeled about, and flounced away in high dudgeon.

Hilda leaned back against one of the bunting-bedecked pillars, and gave herself up to her own bitter reflections.

This White Queen as they called her had nursed her back to life, and for that she was expected to be grateful! Oh! if they only knew what cause she had to curse rather than to thank her. What was her life, Hilda Corrode's, that she should be thankful it had been saved? Naught to look back upon but a past full of weakness, sin and a man's treachery; a present nothing but drudgery and discontent; and the future——

Then she heard David Engleheart's deep rich voice behind her. He had crossed over to where Carrie and Sammy were, and he was saying:

"Poor chap! Don't worry! It will be all right!"

The words were nothing to Hilda Corrode. It is doubtful even if she took in their meaning. But the voice turned the whole current of her thoughts. Her face lost its hard expression, and a new light, a light almost of hope, came into her dark eyes.

No! She was wrong. She ought to thank Queenie Carruthers. She did thank her. A future with him by her side, and the dreary, sinful past would be as a fitful dream that is forgotten. He was approaching. She could feel his presence though her eyes could not see. She could hear the vibration of his voice upon her heart, though she were deaf as the stones.

"Miss Corrode!"

She turned slowly and faced him. Ah, who would have called Hilda Corrode cold and domineering

then? Her eyes were soft and appealing, and her red lips were tremulous with feeling.

David Engleheart was struck with her beauty as he had never been before, but it made no impression upon him save one of passing admiration. His heart had passed out of his keeping forever, and another held it in her gentle possession.

"Miss Corrode."

"Mr. Engleheart."

"There is a favor I want to ask you."

"It is granted already," she answered, quickly.

"Now, don't be rash," said David, with a smile. "You don't know what it may be."

She caught her breath, and wild, foolish fancies darted through her brain. Ordinarily she was a calm, self-collected woman of the world, but now she became as impulsive as a schoolgirl.

"There is no favor in the world too great for me to accord you," she exclaimed, with a catch in her voice.

David looked at her in surprise. Then he regarded this strong statement simply as a figure of speech, a species of feminine exaggeration. He had never had much to do with women and did not understand the sex very well. Besides, in spite of the adulation he had received from the public, he was altogether too modest a man to suspect the passion he had kindled in Hilda's breast.

"Really, now, that is very kind of you," he said, simply. "It's about that lad, Sammy Blythe."

Hilda's heart sank with the weight of her disappointment.

"What of him?" she asked, impatiently, turning partially away.

"It appears that your usual clown has been drinking again, and young Blythe has to deputize for him. Poor Sammy is in a fearful state of nervousness, and I want you to do your best to pull him through."

Miss Corrode's whole manner had changed. She was now her usual self again, cold, hard and repellant.

"I have no sympathy with these novices," she said, sneeringly. "Instead of encouraging this young man, you would be doing him a greater kindness by advising him to return to his desk in the office."

Dave was disappointed and puzzled as well. He could not understand this sudden change.

"I don't know," he said, slowly. "Sammy's a decent chap, and we're all the better for a little fresh blood. I am afraid some of us are too ready to forget when we were struggling beginners, and how an encouraging word or a helping hand lightened our burdens and put hope into our hearts. But I am sorry you don't approve of my request, though it is such a small one. I must strive to encourage Sammy."

He turned to go, but Hilda caught him by the arm. It would never do to let him go, displeased with her, and she deeply regretted that she had given way to her feelings and allowed her chagrin to have sway.

"No! no!" she exclaimed, eagerly and remorse-

fully. "Don't go to him! Of course I will do anything you wish!"

David turned to her again, with a bright smile of thanks upon his face.

"Now, that is really kind of you," he said, heartily. "And in return let me pay you a compliment. Do you know that you are looking very handsome to-night?"

Hilda flushed brightly beneath her rouge, and she looked up at him with an expression that would have told almost any other man the truth.

"Do you think so, really?" she asked.

"Of course I do," he answered, lightly, "or I shouldn't say it."

She caught his hand.

"Mr. Engleheart," she said, breathlessly, "I in my turn have a favor to ask of you."

"Speak, Miss Corrode."

"I want to see you alone, away from all this," with a gesture of disdain. "I have something to say to you, something of great importance to myself, and," faltering a little, "perhaps also to you."

Dave looked the surprise he felt. He could not imagine what this important matter might be. But of course it was impossible for him to refuse such a request.

"I am always at your service, Miss Corrode," he said, courteously.

"Then—then to-morrow?"

He bowed assent.

"To-morrow morning at eleven o'clock I shall be

at Morecombe Bay, just opposite Peel Castle. Will you be there also?"

He bowed again gravely, at the same time gently releasing his hand from her clasp.

"I will be there."

"Miss Corrode, it is your turn," called the impatient voice of Jonesio.

"To-morrow, then."

"To-morrow!"

She gathered up her skirt, and, after flashing a brilliant smile at him, walked away with the undulating motion peculiar to her.

As Hilda rode Margery into the ring she was thinking to herself, her heart beating to suffocation in her breast:

"To-morrow, I play to win or lose all! If I am to lose, I pray Heaven that this horse will crush me beneath his feet to-night!"

CHAPTER V.

DISINHERITED.

Captain Rodney Haynes, of Her Majesty's Guards, was a man of the world in the worst sense that the appellation implies.

Handsome, well educated, excellently connected on both sides of his family, and possessed of a modest competence, it would seem, when he received his commission that the young man started with exceptional advantages in life.

But there was a bad streak somewhere in Rodney Haynes' blood. He seemed to be wholly conscienceless, esteeming men only for what he could obtain from them, and looking upon every woman as his natural prey. Many a young man had been brought to financial ruin by Haynes' too clever manipulation of the cards, and many a poor girl traced her downfall to his lures.

There was more than one ugly whisper about him, rumors of questionable transactions which, if they could have been proved would have resulted in his dismissal from the army. But they were only rumors. He was far too clever a man not to cover up his tracks, and the tools he selected to do his disreputable work he owned body and soul, and not one of them would have dared to speak.

But, like many unscrupulous scoundrels, he was

self-indulgent and luxury-loving to a degree. Nothing that captured his fancy could he deny himself, and he lived at a cost of three or four times his actual income. The consequence was that his capital was slowly but surely encroached upon, and, at the age of thirty-five, Captain Rodney Haynes found himself without a penny in the world, and deeply in debt to the Jews.

It had not been a very difficult matter for him to obtain advances from this latter fraternity. For he had an uncle, Mark Carruthers, his mother's brother, who was a very rich banker, and it was popularly supposed that Haynes would inherit all the large fortune, as it was not generally known that Mr. Carruthers had any other living relative. The young man himself had never had any doubt about the matter. He had always kept on good terms with his uncle and had taken special pains to appear at his best before him.

But now the old man was dead and buried, and the day of the funeral the will was read. To the surprise of all, except the family solicitor who had drawn up the document, Rodney Haynes was left only ten thousand pounds. With the exception of a few trifling legacies, the entire estate, which amounted to over a hundred thousand pounds, was left to a niece of the deceased, a niece he had never spoken to and whom he had steadfastly refused to recognize.

The blow was a crushing one. It meant ruin, irretrievable ruin to the guardsman. The amount left to him would not even pay his debts.

It is little wonder, then, that he was in a state bordering on frenzy, as he paced up and down his luxuriously-furnished apartments in the Albany. The quaffing of innumerable glasses of brandy and soda did not tend to allay his excitement.

But he was not a man to give up without a struggle. Scheme after scheme occurred to his fertile brain, only to be rejected one after the other.

A knock at the door aroused him, and to his call of, "Come in!" there appeared a gentleman something past the middle age, dressed with scrupulous neatness in almost clerical garb. He had a fresh, ruddy complexion, keen blue eyes, gray hair, and small gray side whiskers. He was the very type of a respectable family lawyer, which indeed he was. The adviser of some of the most prominent people in the city, it was said, and probably with truth, that the green tin boxes in Mr. Furnaby Fuller's offices in Lincoln's Inn contained secrets and documents that were worth millions of pounds.

The gentleman gave one glance at Rodney Haynes' flushed face, and then, advancing into the room, put his hat upon the table, and seated himself in one of the leather-covered armchairs.

He folded his hands across his somewhat protuberant stomach, and said, gravely:

"This is a bad business for you, Rodney, a very bad business. Believe, me, I am sincerely sorry for you."

"You are not half as sorry for me as I am for myself," replied Haynes, savagely. "The old fool

must have been insane. He was so, and I'll prove it!"

Fuller looked at him from over his glasses. He had known the young man all his life, and Haynes would have been somewhat startled had he guessed how many of his transactions were an open book to this quiet old gentleman.

"If you mean that you intend to contest the will, Rodney," said the lawyer, "you are on the wrong tack. Your late uncle was an exceptionally well-balanced man, quite as sane, if not saner, than either you or I. You would not have a leg to stand on."

A fierce oath broke from Rodney Haynes' lips. He knew that the opinion of Mr. Fuller on such matters was worth more than that of any other man in London.

He poured out another glass of brandy and drained it off. Then, throwing himself down into a chair on the other side of the table, he turned to the lawyer.

"Why did my uncle disinherit me? You must know. Tell me that."

"I will tell you all that I can honorably."

Haynes' lip curled, but he said nothing. He knew that the lawyer was not a man to be intimidated or bribed; and intimidation or bribery, sometimes both, had been the captain's strongest weapons in more cases than one.

"The fact of it is, Rodney," proceeded the lawyer, "that certain episodes in your life came to your uncle's ears."

Rodney struck the table a violent blow with his fist.

"Damn it! What cur went to him with tales against me?"

"That I cannot tell you. But," after a slight pause, "your uncle knew of your connection with the Helliwell Mansion."

Haynes turned pale. Fuller noticed this, and, if he had ever had any doubt of the truth of the story repeated to him by Mr. Carruthers, he had none now. The fact of the matter was that Haynes had been the virtual proprietor of the Helliwell Mansion, one of the most magnificent and most notorious gambling houses in London. But this had been so carefully screened that he had been confident that it would never be found out. Some one must have betrayed him. He swore to himself that if he ever found out who it was that some one should suffer even as he was suffering now.

But, nevertheless, he attempted to brazen the matter out before Mr. Fuller.

"It was a lie!" he exclaimed, emphatically. "A lie!"

"At all events, your uncle believed it," returned Mr. Fuller, quietly.

"And this is the reason I was cut off with a paltry ten thousand?"

"That and one other thing."

"Well?"

"Mr. Carruthers was a very peculiar man."

"He has proved it!"

"Beneath a cold exterior," went on Mr. Fuller, heedless of the interruption, "was hidden a warm heart, and as just a one as I ever knew. You are

aware how the marriage of your other uncle, Julian Carruthers, alienated him from his brother. With all his good qualities, which I have just hinted at, Mark Carruthers was excessively obstinate. It was the most difficult thing in the world for him to acknowledge himself to be in the wrong. He really loved his brother and I believe sincerely grieved for him."

"Oh, cut it short! Come to the point!"

The lawyer's countenance took on an even deeper tinge of red at these curt words; but he made allowances for Haynes' quite natural impatience and irritation.

"You and the daughter of Julian Carruthers were his only blood relations," he continued, quietly. "When the stories about you, true or not," with a deprecatory wave of the hand, "reached him his thoughts turned toward his niece."

Rodney ground his teeth viciously together.

"He knew that she had been given in charge of certain circus people called Jonesio. He found out where the circus was playing and went there. He was greatly taken with the young lady's appearance. He made inquiries about her, and everything he heard redounded to her advantage. And then——"

"And then?"

"He made his will."

Haynes was silent. A new idea had entered his head. He wondered that he had not thought of it before. There was a way by which he might yet come into possession of the property which, as he told himself, was rightly his. This girl had as yet

mixed with only the lower strata of society. She would be dazzled by her accession to wealth. She would need an adviser in the new rank she was entering. Why should not that adviser be himself? He thought of his successes with women and smiled confidently. Surely he would be able to win her. That would be an easy victory. He had always had an aversion to matrimony, but in this case the stakes were worth the sacrifice. Once her husband and the fortune was his.

His face, which had hitherto been lowering, cleared.

"Do you know where the heiress is?" he asked, turning suddenly toward Mr. Fuller.

"Certainly," replied the lawyer. "Next week the circus will be in Blackburn. I shall go there to announce to her her good fortune."

Haynes rose to his feet.

"I will go with you," he said, with a smile.

Mr. Fuller started a little. He felt instinctively that there was something behind this declaration, which he could not just at the moment fathom.

"Why?" he asked.

"Why!" repeated Hayens, laughingly. "Isn't she the one blood relation I have on earth? Isn't it my duty to make her acquaintance?"

CHAPTER VI.

WOMAN PROPOSES.

The circus was playing that week in Barrow-in-Furness, that extraordinary town, which, like some of the Western cities in America, sprang, mushroom-like, into prosperity in a night.

It is a dull, ugly place on the whole, as towns given up entirely to the making of money are apt to be, but it is surrounded by some of the most beautiful scenery, some of the most picturesque and interesting spots in all England.

It was a lovely morning late in the summer, one of those days when all nature seems to be in tune. The flowers flung forth their most fragrant odors, the birds sang their sweetest, and the waters of Morecombe Bay sparkled and rippled as if in pure glee at the kisses of the sun, which rode triumphant in the midst of a cloudless sky.

Hilda Corrode, as she walked slowly up and down upon the grassy bank above the beach, noticed all this, and she wondered if it were a happy augury. Then her eyes fell upon the gloomy, repellant gray walls of Peel Castle on the island just opposite, and she shuddered superstitiously. Was the rest of her life to be passed in the sunshine or in dungeon-like gloom?

Oh, if her past were only clear! But what mattered that? The future, the future alone was hers. She would cast from her all the sin and shame that had besmirched her and bask in a purer, sweeter existence than she had ever known. If but her prayers were answered she would go back to her girlhood, to what she might have been had not circumstances and man's baseness made her what she was.

A step sounded behind her, and she turned to see coming toward her the man upon whom all her hopes were based. He had kept his word. The crucial moment was close at hand.

Dave Engleheart greeted her pleasantly, but while her hand trembled a little as she placed it in his, his grasp was firm.

They walked forward a little side by side, and then seated themselves beneath the shadow of a great rock.

For awhile neither of them spoke, Dave, because he was waiting for her to begin the conversation she had requested, and she because her emotion almost overpowered her. Oh! Why would he not help her? Why did he not read her secret in her eyes, hear the love beating at her heart?

Dave was the first to break the silence, which he found a little oppressive.

"Miss Corrode, you have asked me to meet you here on an important matter. May I ask you what it is."

She started and the color faded from her cheeks.

"Mr. Engleheart—David," she said, hesitatingly, "I—I want to ask your advice."

"Certainly," he answered, cordially, "if you think it will be of any value."

She found it very hard to go on, but she had come there with a purpose, and she could endure the suspense no longer.

"It—it is about a friend of mine, a woman who is in great trouble."

"Well?"

She moved a little, so that she could see his face and note its every expression. And then she continued, her voice vibrating with the intensity of her feeling.

"She has given her heart unasked to a man who, if he does not love her already, her great love must in time compel his heart to turn to her. But he makes no sign, and the cruel law of society forbids a woman to proclaim her passion, denies her the right to cry out, 'I love you! I love you!' What, then, do you advise?"

She waited for his answer, her eyes fixed intently upon his face, and her breath coming with difficulty.

Dave was silent for a moment. For the first time a suspicion of the truth dawned upon him, and he was almost sorry that he had come. For her, however, there was as yet nothing but pity. But, if his suspicions were correct, she must be prevented from saying anything more. Generalities must not become personalities.

At last he spoke, slowly and very gravely:

"The best advice to offer her would be patience."

"But she fears that in the meantime another younger and fairer than she, may come between them."

"Then she must accept the common lot of her sex, to suffer and make no sign."

Hilda sighed, and, turning away her eyes, gazed for a moment over the bright waters of the bay, as if seeking inspiration. She thought he was blind, but, whatever he might have been in the past, now he was not so blind as she.

Then she returned to the charge.

"Then you—you would not have her speak, just to hint at her great love, so that he perhaps may turn his eyes with pity upon her?"

Dave hesitated a moment. He was in a very unpleasant position, and he scarcely knew how to extricate himself from it. Finally he determined to be cruel only to be kind.

"It would not be pity, Miss Corrode," he said, with stern severity. "It would be contempt. Woman's greatest charm in a man's eyes is that she must be sought and fought for before she is won."

Hilda, with a choking sensation, felt that her hopes were gradually being strangled to death. But she had gone too far now to retreat. She must and would know the truth and the whole truth.

"But, David," she persisted, feverishly, "if this wretched woman felt that her soul's salvation hung upon his slightest word, if she knew that sooner than miss the daily kindly glance, the careless pressure of his hand, she would be content to become his servant, his slave!"

With his whole heart and soul, David Engleheart was sorry for her; but the situation was becoming intolerable, and he felt that it must be ended at all costs.

He rose hastily to his feet, cutting her short.

"Hush, Miss Corrode! If this woman is really your friend," keeping up the fiction which was no longer one, "forsake her! she is worthless!"

Hilda, too, had risen, and at this denunciation the color sprang hot into her cheeks and her eyes flashed fire. Then she burst forth, in a perfect torrent of passion.

"Man! man! Are you made of stone? Have you eyes to see? Can you not understand? Oh, David, my whole life has been so hard and bitter, so full of vain longing for an honest heart to cling to! I have never had a single being take my hand or give me a kind word but from a selfish motive. When I came to join this circus, my life had become so hateful to me that I had resolved to end it all, but since you have crossed my path, the sunshine has once more entered into my soul. I feel new life, new hopes, new happiness. There is no height in woman's sphere to which I could not rise, no ambition too great to be surmounted. Take me!" stretching out her arms imploringly. "Take me, David, and we will become great, rich, famous!"

It was pitiful and pitiable, almost like the cry of a lost soul, begging for one more chance to obtain salvation.

David was touched to the innermost depths of his

being, at the same time that he was revolted at this casting to the winds of all true womanliness.

"Miss Corrode," he began, "I——"

"No! no!" she interrupted, passionately, knowing that for her the star of hope had faded, and yet refusing to accept the fact. "Don't turn away from me, for God's sake! Pity me, David, pity me!"

The poor woman sank upon her knees in the grass, in abject appeal.

"Speak one word of love to me! My heart is breaking for it, breaking, breaking!"

The words died away and became inarticulate in a storm of convulsive sobs.

David stooped and raised her to her feet.

"Miss Corrode," he said, his voice shaking in spite of his efforts to control it. "Miss Corrode, I cannot express to you my deep regret, my sincere sorrow. I don't know how to frame my words, but—but it cannot be."

She moaned drearily. Her eyes half closed, and then opened wide again as she made her last appeal.

"Don't send me from you lightly, David! Remember it is the salvation of my soul you hold in your hands this day!"

"I cannot, I must not believe such words," replied David, desperately. "I am sure the fault of all this is with me. Unwittingly I must have given you a wrong impression that I was fortunate enough to care for you. If this was so, I ask you to forgive me."

It was a noble, generous way of putting it, and Hilda, through the clouds that were enveloping her,

dimly realized it. The sun was still shining as brightly as ever, but not for her. All she could see were the grim, forbidding walls of Peel Castle, which typified to her the dungeon in which the rest of her life must be passed.

"No," she answered, wearily. "I have nothing to reproach you with. "But," suddenly rousing herself, "tell me, David, is there, is there some one else?"

It was a question she had no right to ask, and David felt that it was an intrusion upon the most sacred thing of his life. Still, he owed this unhappy woman much consideration, and it would be better for all, both in the present and the future, for him to answer frankly.

"Yes," he said, gently, "there is some one else."

Instantly as if by magic, Hilda's whole attitude was transformed. She was no longer a suppliant, but a woman half mad with jealous rage.

The poet never said anything truer than when he declared: "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned," and this is doubly true when she is scorned for another.

"Queenie Carruthers!" Hilda cried, fiercely.

"I——"

"Stop! Don't tell me! I know already! Know that this baby-faced doll with her soft, low voice and purring, pleading airs, has come between us. But for her your heart must have turned to me in time. Oh, David, don't pass me by for this! She will be but a burden around your neck, while I would lead your steps on to fame and fortune!"

There was an ominous glitter in David's gray eyes, which showed that his patience was rapidly coming to an end. Most of us crave affection, but a great love given unsought, undesired, is apt to engender only repulsion. What is forced upon us we avoid, but what flies from us we pursue. It is even unwise to let those we love know how much we love them. Something should always be kept in reserve.

"You are very good," answered David, satirically, "but I desire to share whatever the future may have in store for me with the woman I love. While health and strength are vouchsafed me, our bread shall be earned by my exertions only, and whether God sends us joys or sorrows, clouds or sunshine, we will share them together and thank Him just the same."

If the words had been chosen for that purpose, as assuredly they were not, nothing could have been better calculated to arouse the worst passions in Hilda Corrode's undisciplined heart.

"Take your wire-walker!" she cried, violently. "Your mountebank coming from God knows where, and born by God knows whom! I have humbled myself to the dust for nothing, it seems, but I warn you both to keep from my path! As Hilda Corrode can love, so can she hate! Now, go, go! for there is danger in me!"

David Engleheart listened to this tirade with face stern and cold. He was a man slow to anger, but there was one thing he could not endure, and that was reflections upon the woman he loved. All softer feelings inspired by the unhappiness of the woman before him, died within him, and with all

his heart he longed that she were a man, so that he could give the answer to her insults that they deserved.

But he was forced to crush back his anger, and deal his blow only in words.

"But now I pitied you," he said. "Don't make me despise you. As for your threats, they are but idle words to me. You are a woman, and, although seemingly you have lost some of the sweetest attributes of your sex, still, as a man, I am bound to look upon you with consideration, with indulgence. But," with stern intonation. "I warn you, even these will have their limit, and I will show neither mercy nor pity to those who attempt to harm the woman I love!"

He turned abruptly from her, and walked away up the incline which led to the heights above.

Hilda, with despair and anguish in her eyes, watched him until he had disappeared.

Then she flung herself, face forward, down upon the grass, in the shadow of the rock, a shadow over her, which was never to be lifted.

She had staked all, and lost!

CHAPTER VII.

HEART TO HEART.

David Engleheart, after perhaps the most unpleasant interview he had ever had in his life, struck off into the country, walking at random, with no objective point in view. He turned into a lane, with high banks on each side, over which the blackberry bushes, loaded with fruit, struggled in picturesque confusion.

It was a lonely sort of road, the thatched cottages were few and far between, and except for an occasional farmer's wagon, or a group of children here and there, playing in the muddy ditch which ran along one side of the lane, there was no sign of life.

This suited David exactly, for he wanted to be alone with his own thoughts. His conscience, high-minded fellow that he was, was not entirely at ease. He wondered if he could, unwittingly, have given this woman any reason to speak as she had done. Had the ordinary compliments he had paid her been misunderstood? He was absolutely without vanity, and, what to some men would have been a source of congratulation was to him simply provocative of sorrow and regret.

After long reflection he concluded that he was blameless in the matter. He could not have foreseen what had occurred.

And then he thought of Hilda's threats. So far as he himself was concerned, he cared but little for them. But Queenie? Could she harm her? It was not probable, and yet, where Queenie was concerned no chances must be taken. He must constitute himself her protector as soon as possible. But would she accept him as such? He was not sure, but he hoped and prayed so. And if she did, his whole life would be devoted to making her happy.

"My little queen!" he murmured. "My little queen! Whatever happens, you shall find me the most devoted of your subjects!"

He had walked on, not noticing where his feet were carrying him, and suddenly he looked up to see before him the ruins of Furness Abbey.

The monks of old were wise in worldly as well as in spiritual affairs, and nothing proves this better than the lovely sites they invariably chose for their residences.

There is no spot in the surrounding country so exquisite as that where Furness Abbey was built.

David looked at the broken piles of masonry and tried to reconstruct, in his mind's eye the cloisters, the refectory and the chapel. He attempted to project himself back several centuries, and to fancy himself a wandering knight, coming to beg hospitality of the abbot.

As he thought this it was borne in upon him that he was decidedly hungry. He was about to seek the little station close to the abbey, where there is an excellent restaurant, when the sound of voices and laughter reached his ears.

Then some one cried:

"Oh, Queenie, take care! You'll upset the milk!"

It was a most prosaic exclamation, but it brought Dave Engleheart's heart into his mouth. It was Carrie's voice. Queenie! Then she must be there, close to him.

He picked his way over the masses of granite which had once formed part of the walls of the abbey, until through an opening he could look into the roofless enclosure which had formerly been the chapel.

There was rather an irreverent group there. Three ladies were seated upon the grassy ground, and before them was spread a substantial luncheon.

Mrs. Jones, Carrie and Queenie had come out to the abbey to enjoy an al fresco repast.

Dave came toward them, hat in hand.

His advent was greeted with cries of delight from Carrie, smiles of welcome from Mrs. Jones, and blushes from Queenie.

They insisted that he should sit down and share their luncheon, an invitation which it is needless to say Dave accepted with alacrity.

It was a merry meal that followed. Carrie was in the highest of spirits, and Mrs. Jones was full of anecdote of her former experiences in the ring.

If Queenie was a little quiet it detracted nothing from the general enjoyment. Her lovely face showed that she was content.

Dave, as he looked at her, which was most of the time, thought that in all England there was surely not a more exquisite specimen of girlhood. Her

gown of pale blue muslin, with a broad straw hat adorned with clusters of forget-me-nots was very becoming to her delicate coloring.

If it were destined that she was to be his, surely earth would have nothing else to offer. His happiness would be beyond compare. And then, his heart sank as he thought how unworthy he was of her, how unworthy any man is of a pure and innocent girl.

Shrewd Carrie was not at all ignorant of what was passing in his mind, and she was far more cognizant of Queenie's feelings than he was himself. Already it seemed to her that she could hear the sound of wedding bells.

She determined that at any rate it should not be her fault if "this consummation, devoutly to be wished" did not come to pass.

It was exactly in this way that she put it to herself, too, for Carrie had an ambition beyond her calling. Shakespeare was her idol, and she longed above everything else to have the opportunity some day to represent his heroines. So quotations from the immortal bard were constantly in her thoughts, although, for fear of ridicule, they were rarely upon her lips.

After full justice had been done to the luncheon, and the hamper had been repacked with what it was necessary to take back, Carrie turned to Mrs. Jones and gave her a significant look.

"Mother," she said, "suppose you and I explore the ruins a little. I am sure you will find them interesting."

But Mrs. Jones was sleepy after the meal, to which she had done full justice, and did not feel like moving.

She clasped her hands in fat contentment, as she leaned back against a block of stone behind her.

"Really, my dear, I am very comfortable. I think I would like to take a little nap."

Carrie was disgusted, but she was not at the end of her resources.

"Very well, then," she said. "I will stay here with you. And perhaps Mr. David will show Queenie about. I know she is longing to explore these ruins."

Would Mr. David show Queenie about? It was the very opportunity he had been longing for.

"I shall be only too happy," he said, "if Miss Carruthers will accept me as her cicerone."

Queenie rose and smilingly assented. But her heart was beating violently, with a premonition of what was to come. It is rare that a woman does not know when words of love are to be spoken to her, and she is almost always prepared either to accept or reject them. Queenie was no exception to the rule.

As the two disappeared beneath the broken arch which led to the cloisters, Carrie turned indignantly to her mother.

"Really, mother, I am surprised at you!" she exclaimed.

At this Mrs. Jones' sleepy eyes, which were almost closing, opened wide.

"Why, my dear," she said, in amazement. "I don't understand you."

"Then you ought to. You've had experience enough. Don't you know that I wanted to give Dave and Queenie a chance?"

"A chance?"

"Oh, mother," impatiently. "Don't you see he's dying to speak to her alone?"

Then Mrs. Jones did understand.

"Dear me! Dear me!" she said, fussily, attempting to rise. "Of course! Of course! How stupid of me! I know what it is myself. Why, when I rode barebacked before the Prince of Wales——"

"There! There! Mother, never mind that!" interrupted Carrie, pushing her gently back. "It's all right now. And when you wake up I think there'll be a piece of news to tell you."

Meanwhile Dave and Queenie were walking slowly and in silence amid the broken columns of the old cloisters. Before them lay an exquisite landscape, valley and upland, smiling in the afternoon's sunshine. But neither of them was thinking of scenery, however beautiful.

At last they paused at the end of the row of columns, and sat down side by side upon a long stone slab.

Then David spoke, and, as usual in the preliminaries of such cases, his words apparently had but little or nothing to do with the matter uppermost.

"What a good little soul Carrie is!"

"Of course she is, always," assented Queenie, cordially. "But why so particularly now?"

"Because," replied David, moving involuntarily nearer, "she has given me this chance to be alone

with you. And I have something very important to say to you, something that I can only say when we're alone."

Queenie's great blue eyes were turned upon him, and then the long lashes fell, and the color stole upward into her fair cheeks.

"I hope it's nothing serious," she said, softly.

"Something very serious indeed," replied David, in low, tense tones, "for it concerns the future of both our lives."

The joy bells were ringing in Queenie's ears, and she trembled a little with the immense happiness his presence and words brought to her.

"You must long have guessed what I am about to say," he went on, his whole heart in his voice, "as have those around us. I love you, Queenie, love you with a strength and passion that time will be powerless to kill."

The Queen of the Slack Wire would not have changed places with any real queen or empress in all the wide world at that moment. To her mind, not one of them had so much to be proud of as she.

But she could not move, she could not speak in that first instant of her supreme happiness. She could only sit there with downcast eyes and sweet tremulous lips, and listen with greedy ears to the music of his voice, to the recital of that old, old story which is ever new, ever absorbing, ever entrancing.

"From the first day that we met, you have become part of my life. Every new task mastered, every fresh effort accomplished, was all for your

sweet sake, for I knew they brought me nearer the day when I could claim you. Speak, Queenie, answer me! Tell me your thoughts, as I have told you mine!"

He paused, and waited breathlessly for her answer.

Then at last the glorious eyes were again uplifted and fixed full upon his face with infinite trust, with deepest tenderness.

"Yes, David," she said in low, but clear tones, "I will tell you my inmost thoughts. What my heart more than my lips would fain cry out. There is not a prouder or happier girl in the land than I to-day, for I love you, David, and thank God, who made us for each other!"

With a low cry of joy and gratitude, he leaned toward her. His arms encircled her, and her lips received the first kiss of a lover.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SHOWER OF GOLD.

There was a variety of sentiments among the artists of Signor Jonesio's Grand Cosmopolitan Circus when, after the performance that night, David Engleheart made them a little speech, announcing, his face fairly gleaming with happiness, that he and Miss Queenie Carruthers were about to sign a life-long contract—in other words, to become man and wife. At the same time he tendered the resignations of himself and the Queen of the Slack Wire, to take effect at the end of the present tenting season, which would be in the neighborhood of another month.

The warm-hearted circus people surrounded the happy couple and showered them with congratulations. Mrs. Jones and Carrie being especially delighted at this culmination of the love affair they had watched with so much interest, and indeed had been the first to prophesy.

Still amidst all the joy, there was a certain under feeling of sorrow, for both David and his betrothed were very popular, and their separation from the circus, of which they had been the most brilliant stars, was anticipated with keen regret.

This sentiment was voiced by the manager, when he said, with rare unselfishness, of which he was occasionally capable (probably due to the example of his good wife):

"You're taking the pride of the circus away from us, David, but you're a good fellow; and the old man hopes God will bless you every time."

There was one, however, who stood aloof, her heart filled with jealous rage. The announcement of this engagement, which nevertheless she of all others ought to have foreseen, was in the nature of a death blow to Hilda Corrode.

Queenie noticed that from her came no expression of good wishes. Her sweet face suffused with blushes, she approached her timidly, and said gently, almost imploringly:

"Hilda, for some reason you seem to have grown cold and distant, to have almost avoided me; but I want you to kiss me now and say we are friends once more."

Hilda drew herself up, and, although her eyes were ablaze with the inward fires which were consuming her, she managed to hold herself in check, and answered, coldly and haughtily:

"With so many around you, my congratulations will scarcely be missed. At any rate, they will keep till to-morrow."

And then she swept away from the scene of jubilation which was so repulsive to her.

Sammy and Carrie, who happened to be standing near, heard this ungracious speech, and both were filled with indignation.

"Now, that's what I call nice and friendly," exclaimed Sammy, sarcastically. "Blest if that woman ain't cold enough to burst a water-pipe!"

Carrie quite agreed with him, but, possessed of

more tact than he, she saw how foolish it would be to take up the matter, and she managed to quiet him.

In honor of the occasion, a modest little supper, furnished by the manager, followed, and, in the midst of the general hilarity, Hilda Corrode's absence was not noted.

The next day was Sunday, and a busy day, too, for the circus moved to Blackburn, their next stand.

Monday found the tents all up, and the Jones family installed in comfortable lodgings not far from the park. Queenie, who always lived with them, shared their apartments.

It was destined to be an eventful day for all concerned—no one had the least presentiment of how eventful, until the astonishing news, which was to make such a change in all their lives, was suddenly imparted to them.

About four o'clock, Mrs. Jones was seated at the window of the common sitting-room, when she saw two gentlemen, one old, the other comparatively young, come slowly down the street and pause in front of the house.

They looked up at the number above the door, and then mounting the steps, rang the bell.

Mrs. Jones, ever on the alert to protect the two girls in her charge, as she had reason to be from experience, glanced toward the other end of the room, where Queenie and Carrie were busy altering some costumes, while at the same time they gossiped in low tones to their hearts' content, and then rising, stole out into the hall.

She saw the slatternly maid-servant of the lodging

house go to the door, and then she heard one of the gentlemen ask for Miss Queenie Carruthers.

This was enough for Mrs. Jones, already suspicious as she was. With the stride of a tragedy queen, she advanced to the door, and, thrusting the maid aside, confronted the two men on the steps outside.

"You wish to see Miss Queenie Carruthers?" she asked, sternly, folding her arms in a defiant manner.

"Yes, if you please," answered the elder of the two gentlemen.

"Well, you won't!" declared Mrs. Jones, barring the way with her portly figure. "You just clear out of this, and go home to your wife and family, you hoary-headed old reprobate!"

The gentleman thus addressed gazed at her in amazement. He could not understand in the least, and wondered if he had suddenly been brought into contact with a lunatic. His companion, however, who had had more experience, fully realized the situation, and with difficulty prevented himself from laughing aloud at the absurd and anomalous position in which this staid and respectable lawyer found himself.

"But, my dear madam," began Mr. Fuller, deprecatingly, "I assure you——"

But Mrs. Jones was convinced that she was right, and was not to be placated by what she considered to be wheedling words.

"Don't you talk to me!" she interrupted, indignantly and loudly. "Don't you dare to talk to me. I know the likes of you. You think because a girl

chooses to earn an honest penny by exhibiting her talent, she'll be a prey to every old sinner that chooses to make faces at her!"

Mr. Fuller was dumfounded. He did not know what to say; while Rodney Haynes, convulsed with inward laughter, could not just at that moment come to his rescue.

Then a sweet voice, just behind Mrs. Jones, said beseechingly:

"Oh, mother, don't! I'm sure you are mistaken!"

Queenie and Carrie had been attracted to the hall, by the noise of the controversy, a noise, however, in justice to Mr. Fuller, which was mostly produced by Mrs. Jones herself.

The well-meaning, but mistaken lady, half turned toward Queenie, without abandoning her position, which served as a barricade.

"My child," she said, uncompromisingly, "you don't know the world as I do. Now, you be off," wheeling again toward the uncomfortable and disgusted lawyer, "while you've a whole bone left in your disreputable old carcass!"

Then Haynes thought it was time to interfere. Amusing as the whole affair was, and good story though it would make for him to tell at the club, there were important matters at issue, and, taking those into consideration, it behooved him to do all that he could to put a stop to this misunderstanding at once.

He removed his hat very politely, and gently pushed Fuller to one side.

"My dear madam," he said in his most suave and

courteous tones, "pardon me, but you are making a great mistake. This gentleman is a grave family solicitor from London, and he and I are here to see Miss Carruthers on most important business."

Mrs. Jones faltered, and for the first time it dawned upon her that perhaps she had made a mistake. She hemmed and hawed, and then she burst out with characteristic frankness:

"Oh, Lord! I do believe I have made a fool of myself!"

"Without prejudice," said Mr. Fuller, severely, with an irritation that was quite excusable, "I must say it looks very much like it."

It is one thing, however, to call yourself a fool, but quite another to have some one else agree with you. And Mrs. Jones at this speech at once returned to her former aggressive attitude.

"Indeed, sir," she exclaimed, flushing scarlet, assuming her most dignified manner, and reverting to that one incident in her career which was the pride of her life, and which in her opinion gave her distinction from the common herd, "I'd have you to know that when I rode bare-backed before the Prince of Wales——"

"Hush, mother!" said Carrie, gently, putting her arm about her waist and drawing her a little to one side.

This old-time achievement was not the patent of nobility to the daughter that it was to the mother.

Then Queenie, who had been listening quietly, stepped forward.

"I am Queenie Carruthers, gentlemen," she said,

with sweet and gentle dignity. "If you will come in, I shall be glad to hear what you may have to say to me."

Mr. Fuller looked at her, and her whole appearance delighted him. He had been afraid that he was going to meet some common, vulgar woman, to whom, nevertheless, he would be obliged to turn over the fortune which was in his charge, but here was a beautiful girl with a high bred air which to the old lawyer meant far more than mere beauty of face and figure. She would do justice to the fortune which was soon to be hers.

Followed by Haynes, Mr. Fuller entered the house, and was ushered by Queenie into the sitting-room.

Jonesio was there. He had been smoking his pipe in the back yard, and had returned during the controversy which had taken place between his wife and these two strangers.

He looked up somewhat in surprise at their entrance, but, in obedience to a gesture from Carrie, said nothing.

Mrs. Jones sank heavily down into a chair, with her daughter standing behind her. She had dominated matters to a certain point, but now she was prepared to listen and let affairs take their course.

Both Haynes and Fuller had removed their hats, and stood in a respectful attitude near the door. With the latter this was genuine, but with the captain it was assumed for a purpose.

"Well, gentlemen," said Queenie, turning toward them, "what is your business with me?"

At this question, Rodney Haynes advanced a step or two.

"Let me be the first to speak," he said, deferentially, and yet with the air of one who has important information to impart. "Queenie, you see before you the only relative you have in the world. I am your first cousin, Rodney Haynes."

Both Jonesio and his wife started and looked at the speaker with interest. In the inquiries they had made as to Queenie's family, they had heard of this cousin. It could be a matter of no small importance that had brought him here.

"My cousin!" echoed Queenie, faintly, waiting in breathless interest for what was to come next.

"Yes," went on Haynes, seeing the impression he had made, and determined to play to the best of his ability the part he had studied and elaborated beforehand. "Yes, the son of your dead father's only sister. Our parents are all dead, Queenie; we are the last of the old race, and must be very good friends."

As he spoke he took her hands in both of his, and leaning forward, kissed her upon the forehead.

Queenie submitted to the caress. She was just a little dazed at what was being told her, and, beyond that, surely the only relative she had in the world had the right to greet her with cousinly affection.

There was something, however, to Mr. Fuller, which was repulsive in this action. He knew Rodney Haynes too well to have any particular confidence in him, and, while he could not quite understand his attitude to his new-found relative, he felt instinctively that it boded no good.

At all events, it was quite time that he should take a hand in the proceedings. It was his business that had brought them there, and not that of the captain.

"And now, good people, comes my turn," he said, advancing, and surveying each one with a keen, penetrating glance, before he finally addressed himself to Queenie. "My dear Miss Carruthers, in addition to restoring you to your only relative"—was there a trifle of sarcasm in this? If so, the old gentleman did not make it too apparent.—"I am also the bearer of a great piece of good fortune."

"To me," murmured Queenie.

The others were listening most intently to catch the lawyer's next words. Mr. Fuller noticed this, and, as we all of us invariably are pleased to have an audience, and an attentive one at that, when we have anything of importance to deliver, the old gentleman paused for a moment, to heighten the effect of his words before he said impressively:

"Miss Carruthers, as you have doubtless been told, your father greatly offended the prejudices of his family by his marriage, his elder brother, the head of the house, being especially bitter. One by one they all died, leaving this old man with but you and your cousin to claim kindred with him. It was thought by all that the captain here would succeed, but, strange to say, only a few hours before his death, Mr. Carruthers repented of his harshness, and left you his chief heiress."

Had a thunderbolt suddenly fallen into that quiet

room, it could scarcely have caused more excitement than did this statement.

Mrs. Jones, in spite of her avoirdupois, started to her feet, as if she had been a young and sprightly girl. Carrie uttered an exclamation of joy, and Jonesio stared at the laywer as if that quiet gentleman had been a ghost.

Queenie was possibly the most unmoved of them all, although she was certainly the one most interested.

"I?" she said, slowly, attempting, but without great success in that first moment, to realize what it all meant. "I, his chief heiress!"

"Yes, Miss Carruthers," continued Fuller, smiling, and rather enjoying the sensation he had created. "Yes, you the fortunate possessor of one of the finest and richest estates in England, and over a hundred thousand pounds in hard cash."

Again an electric shock passed through his hearers, that is, through the three members of the Jones family. A hundred thousand pounds! To them it was almost inconceivable.

But, after the first surprise, Queenie's first thought turned to David, to the one being on earth who was more to her than all the rest of the world besides, in comparison with whom all the wealth, position and honors that might be forced upon her sank into insignificance. What would he say? This was the question that was interesting her more than anything else.

"In your uncle's will," continued Mr. Fuller, "I am appointed your sole guardian. I am here to take

you to London, where your identity can be established, the will proved, and you can take your proper place in society."

"Yes," added Haynes, taking her hand and bending upon her a look which he had more than once found irresistible with the fair sex, but which left Queenie unmoved, if indeed she was conscious of it, as, absorbed in the thoughts which this news had inspired in her, she left her hand passively in his. "Yes, and where, my dear cousin, you will find me your devoted slave."

"In society!" said Queenie, slowly, her eyes fixed on vacancy, as if she were attempting to pierce the veil of futurity. "But, gentlemen, the poor girl who has suddenly grown so rich has never known any society but what you see surrounding her." And she glanced with a tender smile toward the Joneses. "Their joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, have become part of her life."

A sneer contracted Rodney Haynes' features, a sneer which he quickly repressed, but not before it had been observed by Carrie, and which inspired that rather astute young girl with a violent dislike for the handsome guardsman, a dislike which she retained to her dying day.

It was an unfortunate indulgence in the expression of his feelings on the captain's part, and one for which he was destined to pay dear in the future. If he could only have known how greatly to his advantage it would have been to make a friend of Carrie Jones, whom at that moment he considered an insignificant little creature, a factor of no importance in

his projects, he would have exercised all his best fascinations to win her.

But all this he did not know. He was thinking only of the new heiress, whose money he had resolved, by fair means or foul, should be his.

"All that must be changed, Queenie," he said, with a mixture of authority and appeal. "We will take you to a life where your beauty and riches will make you a queen. A life of fashion, pleasure, excitement——"

Queenie waved her hand to stop him.

"And love?" she asked. "For that is what I leave behind me." Turning her back upon those who had brought her this great good news, she stretched out her arms to those who had been her friends from childhood. "At least you," she continued, with quivering voice and eyes brimming over with tears, "you, my dear father, mother, and sister, you will come with me and share all the bright and wonderful things this great fortune is to buy."

Mrs. Jones was sobbing quietly to herself. She had cared for Queenie as if she had been her own child, and now she saw a great gulf opening between them. Not even the day when she had ridden bare-backed before the Prince of Wales was any consolation to her now.

Even Jonesio was choking with emotion, but he managed to gasp out:

"Speak, Carrie! I can't. You know what we would say."

"Yes, I know," said Carrie, understanding and obeying her father's insinuation, which was in ac-

cordance with her own feelings. "No, Queenie," firmly, but lovingly, "it cannot be. We shall always be thinking of you and care for you just the same; but among all your fine people and grand surroundings, there will be no place for the poor strolling mountebanks. You will now rise to your proper sphere. We will just remain in ours, and pray for you, and be thankful and content that you are rich and happy."

With passionate indignation, Queenie was about to combat these generous words, when Mr. Fuller intervened, in his slow, convincing way:

"Very sensibly and prettily spoken," he said, with a bow of appreciation to Carrie.

He was in a way honest in this, for he really thought it would be wrong to allow his new client to be hampered, in the new sphere to which she was to be lifted, by these companions of her less fortunate days. He was a conservative man, and, from his own point of view, perhaps he was not wrong. And yet, he was not entirely incrusted with worldliness. The big heart, with which he was born, was still beating in his breast, and at any moment it was apt to assert itself and master all else, all the rules that experience had taught him to obey to the contrary.

But just now he was speaking and acting simply in his professional capacity.

"Now, Miss Carruthers, how soon will you be able to accompany me to London?"

"As soon as possible, dear cousin," said Haynes, pleadingly.

"Queenie, of course you must go as soon as possible," said Jonesio.

"Ah, I might have known this was coming," murmured Mrs. Jones, tearfully, "for it was only last night that I darned all her stockings."

This was decidedly incoherent, and what the connection between the darning of her stockings and Queenie's going away might be, no one could tell. Perhaps Mrs. Jones could have told. But no one was listening to her.

Queenie knew that her sudden departure would put them all to great inconvenience, but she determined that they should not suffer by it.

"I will go with you to-morrow morning, Mr. Fuller," she said.

"Very well. On the eleven o'clock express, then."

And so it was arranged.

But, after they were gone, Queenie, with clasped hands, raised her eyes to Heaven.

"It seems all like a dream!" she murmured to herself. "A dream in which I pray for my awakening!"

CHAPTER IX.

TEMPTER AND TEMPTED.

Rodney Haynes was pretty well satisfied with the way everything was progressing. And yet all rested upon the new heiress, and the influence over her he might manage to obtain.

Left to himself, and dependant upon his own resources, the outlook was desperate enough. He had fairly "got the knock out," as he put it to himself. Nothing more to be expected from the tribe of Solomon, Isaacs & Company, even with their demands of exorbitant interest. There was only one chance before him. And that? Why, a ceremony at St. George's, Hanover Square, or some equally swell church, of course. Theatrical marriages were fashionable in high life just at present. He would make a new departure, and ally himself to the ring and sawdust.

To be sure, this cousin of his, with her circus connections and her large fortune, was not exactly his style, but when a man was forced to give himself away, it did not much matter who or what was the object. Money-bags and lands were the real birds nowadays.

He was thinking all this as he strolled through the park in Blackburn an hour or so after his interview with Queenie.

He had left Mr. Fuller at the hotel. The lawyer was not the associate that was most congenial to him.

They were both to go to the circus that evening, and Haynes felt that this enforced companionship was about as much as he could endure.

He was walking along with bowed head when he almost ran into a woman who was approaching from the opposite direction.

He raised his eyes and stood aside with a muttered apology.

Then he stopped, rooted to the ground, while the woman and himself gazed into each other's faces.

Of all people on earth this was the last person he cared to see. And, save for one reason, the same was true of her.

"Hilda Corrode!" he exclaimed, beneath his breath.

"You!" she muttered, staggering back a little, with one hand pressed convulsively to her heart. "Is it really you?"

But Haynes was not a man to be long phased by anything, natural or supernatural. In a very short time he had recovered from his surprise.

"By Jove, this is a startler!" he said. And then he proceeded, in a tone which was anything but complimentary to the woman of whom he asked the question: "What on earth are you doing here?"

Hilda Corrode was silent for a moment, her eyes never leaving his face. It was not that it was a pleasing contemplation to her. Far from it! But there was not much that she would not have given to be able to read his thoughts, to discover upon his

countenance the secret he was seeking to hide from her.

"Earning my living honestly," she answered at last, in a hard, emotionless voice. "I hope you can say the same."

Haynes flushed darkly, but, controlling the anger which this insinuation aroused in him, he said, with a shrug of his shoulders, and with cynical indifference as to what she might think of the confession contained in his words:

"Thanks, but that is scarcely in my line. And how are you earning your living, may I ask?"

"In the circus."

"So, you've gone back to the old work, eh?"

"Yes," she replied, bitterly, "to the old work of dreary drudgery, the pitiful tinseled shams and gaudy make-believes, back to it all, with a heart broken and dead—killed by a heartless libertine."

Haynes drew a cigarette case from his pocket, selected one of the paper covered rolls of tobacco, and calmly lighted it. The heartless libertine referred to was himself, and he knew it, but he cared little for any epithet that this woman might apply to him.

"Yes," he said, with a careless, cynical smile, and examining her with anything but flattering eyes, with eyes that took in every defect caused by age and misery. "Yes, you look a bit different now to what you did when you were brilliant Carmine Sivella, the mistress of Helliwell Mansion, the aristocratic decoy house and gambling den."

Hilda shivered and raised one gloved hand, half in protest, half in threat.

"Don't remind me of that!" she cried, passionately. "God help all women tempted as I was."

Rodney Haynes laughed lightly, contemptuously.

"And like the rest of them," he said, blowing a ring of smoke and watching it as it drifted away, "having once fallen, you went the whole pace."

Hilda struck her hands together, longing, as she did so, that she had his life between them to crush it out.

"If there were no such men as you, Rodney Haynes," she declared, vehemently, "there would be no such women as I."

And in this, with all her faults, with all that could be justly charged against her, she spoke only the truth. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred women are what men make them.

But Rodney Haynes cared little for this. The past was over. All he cared for was the future, or, to be more accurate, the part he was destined to play in the future.

"What rot!" he laughed, sneeringly. "If it hadn't been for that young cub, Valrose, who got the police to raid the place, you'd been queening it over Helliwell Mansion still. But cat-and-dog interviews are not much in my line, so I'll bid you good-evening."

There was not even a backward glance at her, as he turned on his heel to depart, and yet these two had once fancied themselves desperately in love with each other. And now there was nothing save detestation between them. Hate may turn to love, it is true, and so may indifference, but it must be the hate or indifference which has not been preceded by love.

And yet Hilda detained him.

"No, stay!" she said. "You shall tell me one thing before we part. I pray God never to meet you again. On the day of the police raid, when you, like a coward, left me to face the storm, unaided and alone, you took from me all that bound me to life, all that gave me a sisterhood among honest women. You took from me my little Leila, my child!"

"Well, what of it?"

"You must give her back to me! I insist! I demand!"

It was the cry of the tortured mother's heart. It was the supplication for the one thing that she knew could save her. In the breast of every woman, with whom there is existent one remnant of goodness, the maternal instinct is predominant.

But this, Haynes, the father, did not understand; and, if he had, it would have made but little or no impression upon him, unless he had seen a possibility of utilizing the sacred emotion to his own advantage.

"You're a fool!" he replied, brutally. "What could you do with her in this vagabond life?"

"Oh, Rodney Haynes, can't you comprehend?" implored Hilda. "I want to feel her little arms clinging around my neck! I want to hold her to my heart! I want to hear her call me 'mother.' "

Haynes flung his cigarette away.

"No!" he said. "No! You shall never have her! Not to save your life!"

She threw herself in front of him, with her arms outstretched. Villain though he was, he was the one

man who could help her, could give her back the sole thing that might save her.

"Stay! You shall not go yet! You shall hear all I have to say, or I'll leave the mark of this whip upon your cowardly face!"

She had been exercising Margery that afternoon, and still held her riding-whip in her hand.

Haynes saw that she meant what she said. He had no desire to have his handsome face marred by a lash of the whip. To temporize was now the best policy.

"That's rather theatrical, but awfully convincing," he said, with a short laugh, yielding to the inevitable, and flinging himself down upon one of the benches which was close behind him. "Fire away!"

Then Hilda, woman-like, having won her first advantage, determined to make a clean breast of it all. She had some faint idea that by doing so she might gain her point, although if she had stopped to think, taking into consideration the nature of the man before her, she would have seen how impossible of realization any such hope could be.

She did not stop to think, however, but rushed headlong upon her fate.

"Since I have had this engagement, a love—a love pure and womanly—has crept into my heart, a love that makes me shudder with burning shame at the weak passion that made me your victim. He is far beyond my reach as the Star of the Air, as they call him, but my hopeless worship has softened my heart,

purified my soul, and made me yearn for a higher, nobler life!"

She paused, trembling from head to foot.

Haynes looked at her curiously. He thought he knew women, but he was beginning to make up his mind he did not. This was an extraordinary confession, and one of which he could not see the drift.

"Dear me!" he drawled. "How interesting! And what's the new flame like? Any resemblance to my handsome self?"

Hilda made a gesture which was anything but flattering.

"To you?" she exclaimed, with a curl of her lip. "Why, he is as the lion, you as the jackal!"

"Thanks," laughed Haynes, not in the least affected by this uncomplimentary comparison. He no longer loved the woman who made it, and therefore did not care. "Pity you did not have the same exalted opinion of my attractions a few years ago, isn't it? See what a lot of trouble it would have saved! Well," rising, "I congratulate you. Bless you, my children! May you be happy."

"Oh, I tell you he is not for me," rejoined Hilda, desperately. "But," clinging still to the one hope she saw before her, "I would take my child, and, in some distant country, have a fresh start and earn a name that my little one need not blush to own."

Haynes lit another cigarette. He had not been paying much attention to her and her woes, but he was beginning to wonder if there was not some way in which he could make her of use. There was no

clearly defined plan in his mind as yet, but only a vague possibility.

"Tell me," he said, "who is this man to whom you have given your affections? Does he reciprocate your tender passion, or is there some one else? If so, do you mind telling me her name, and his as well?"

It was an impudent request, but Hilda cared little for that. Her one thought, just then, was the recovery of her child.

"What can it matter to you?" she answered drearily, but nevertheless proceeded to give him the information. "His name is David Engleheart. And she—she is one of the mountebanks at the circus here. They call her Carruthers."

Haynes gave vent to a long, low wistle. This *did* matter considerably to him. Here was a chance, and his brain was quick to form a plan to take advantage of it.

"Hilda Corrode," he said, suddenly, "I'll make a bargain with you. Do what I require of you, and I'll guarantee to bring that man to your feet. I'll give you five thousand pounds for your marriage portion, and your child shall be restored to you."

She looked at him first in amazement, and then one expression after another flitted across her mobile face.

"Are you mad?" she said, at last, very slowly. "What do you mean?"

"Don't speak!" replied Haynes, lowering his voice. "Only listen! Have you heard of the new fortune that has come to Queenie Carruthers?"

"No."

"She has inherited from her uncle, who was also my uncle, over one hundred thousand pounds. I was the expectant heir, and was disappointed."

"You!"

"Yes, I. I am her cousin, the only relative she has in the world."

Hilda could not repress the exclamation that rose to her lips; she knew this man so thoroughly.

"Then God help her!"

"Be silent!" commanded Haynes, harshly. "No heroics now! I am on the brink of ruin. This fortune alone can save me. The only way of obtaining it is by my marriage with Queenie. Follow me to London. I will reopen Helliwell Mansion, with you again as its mistress. The girl must be enticed there. Leave the rest to me."

"And you require my aid in this?"

"Yes. Think of the reward. Your lover, your child, a fortune."

But there was good still left in Hilda Corrode. The compact proposed was too horrible.

"I refuse them all!" she said, haughtily.

"Then this wire-walker will become his wife."

"Let her then, for I could never again look into the eyes of the man I love, if I won him at such a price."

Haynes was furious. He had counted upon this woman, and now, for some ridiculous scruple, she was about to fail him.

"Lose him then!" he exclaimed, savagely. "Blight your whole future life, lose your child, sac-

rifice a fortune! And all for the sake of a woman you hate!"

But she was scarcely listening to him. Her face had grown very white, and her eyes were fixed upon the figure of a man who at that moment chanced to pass on the other side of the avenue. Here was a better aid to Rodney Haynes than all his arguments. For the sight of David Engleheart proceeding in the direction of Queenie's lodgings sent Hilda's blood coursing madly through her veins with jealousy and longing. What mattered that girl, after all?

She turned to Rodney Haynes.

"You are right," she said. "I have reconsidered."

"Is it a bargain, then?" he asked, eagerly.

"Yes," she replied, hoarsely.

. . . . . .

It was a terrible blow to David Engleheart when he heard the news that Queenie was no longer poor, but a rich heiress.

It seemed to him as if a great wall suddenly rose up between them. The world which had been so bright and sunshiny to him now appeared one dull, uncompromising gray.

No word passed his lips as Queenie enthusiastically told him of her great good fortune. He could not speak, but, with a white face, turned away to hide his emotion.

"Why, David!" exclaimed Queenie, pained beyond measure. "Why do you turn away from me? Why do you not take me to your heart and rejoice with me over the good luck that has come to us?"

"Queenie, Miss Carruthers," replied David, in a broken voice, "I ask you to forget the foolish words I spoke to you, when—when I asked you to be my wife. They were spoken only a few days ago, but since then the wings of wealth have borne you far beyond my reach. You are no longer the White Queen of the Slack Wire, but Miss Queenie Carruthers, who can choose her friends, her life partner from among the noblest names of England. All ties formed in your wandering bohemian life must be canceled and forgotten. I—I release you from the only chain that binds you to the old life."

Then Queenie understood, and she loved him even more, if that were possible, for his noble disinterestedness. But was the fortune that she had at first thought a blessing to prove only a curse? No, she would not allow it.

She went to David, and her eyes shining with the love-light, which so long as she lived would never die out, she raised her arms and put them about his neck.

"But, David," she murmured, passionately, "I do not release you! We plighted our troth before Heaven, and not all the wealth in the world shall come between us!"

CHAPTER X.

A DECIDED NEGATIVE.

For over a month Queenie Carruthers had been in London. The old life was done with, a new life was opening before her. Mr. Fuller had introduced her into London society, where she was received with enthusiasm, partially for her beauty, but more—such is the way of the world—for the large fortune she was known to possess.

At her guardian's suggestion, she had taken apartments at the Burlington, a quiet family hotel. But here she was not alone, for Carrie Jones at the very last moment, after a conference with her father and mother, had decided to accompany the girl who had been to her as a sister.

Carrie gave no reason for this save that a woman always has a right to change her mind. But she could have done so had she cared to. By accident, she had overheard at the circus, the night before the day fixed for Queenie's departure a few words between Hilda Corrode and Captain Rodney Haynes. She did not thoroughly understand what these words meant, but she realized that they threatened some danger to Queenie, and she determined to be with her, watch over her, and ward off, if possible, any impending peril.

The two girls, as has been said, had been now in

London for over a month, and, although they had written constantly, not one word had been received from any one connected with the circus.

This was a cause of great anxiety to them both, an anxiety which would have been allayed, however, and turned to righteous indignation could they have been present at an interview which took place one afternoon in the sitting room of their apartments at the Burlington.

The participants in his interview were two, one a waiter, with a thin, cadaverous face whose name was Mark Blackwood, and the other Captain Rodney Haynes.

Rodney had been assiduous in his attentions to his fair and wealthy cousin, but, conceited though he was, he had been forced to confess that these attentions had not been productive of the results he had hoped for.

Queenie had treated him kindly. More than that! In her sympathy for his disappointment, her purse had been almost as his own, but he could not lay the flattering unction to his soul that he had progressed in the slightest degree in her affections.

It was useless to waste more time, and he had come to the Burlington that afternoon with a firm determination to discover if there was any chance for him to obtain by fair means the fortune he coveted. He had not much hope of success, but his plans were already laid in case of failure, and despicable plans they were, too.

As he entered the sitting-room he was not entirely sorry to find it tenanted by only one person.

This person was Mark Blackwood, the waiter, who was busily engaged in removing the breakfast things. It had been Rodney Haynes' especial care that this particular waiter should be the one to attend upon his cousin, and, of course, he had his own reasons for seeing that this should be the case.

"Good-afternoon, captain," said the waiter, as Haynes entered the room.

Rodney nodded in a manner rather familiar, considering the difference in their social stations.

"Any letters?" he asked, curtly.

Mark hesitated. Evidently he would have preferred not to answer, but, as he was quite well aware, he was forced to do so.

"Well, yes, sir," he said, reluctantly. "There are two, but——"

"Give them to me!" commanded Haynes, interrupting and stretching out his hand. "You hear? Quick!"

"You're the master," replied Mark, producing the letters, and handing them over. "There they are."

Haynes took the two letters, and, with a cynical smile, scrutinized the superscriptions. One was directed to Miss Queenie Carruthers and the other to Miss Carrie Jones. These were not the first missives by a good many with the same addresses upon them, that had reached the hands for which they were not intended.

He dropped the letters into his pocket.

"Humph!" he thought to himself. "From Mr.

Highly-Trained Muscle and Mr. Young Aspiring Genius! So much paper and ink wasted!"

The waiter came forward, with a look of pleading upon his pale face. He ought to have known and doubtless did know, how hopeless any appeal to the captain might be. But still, moved to pity as he was for those who had been kind to him, Mark Blackwood resolved to try.

"Beg pardon, captain," he said, "but you might let me give the young ladies just them two."

Rodney Haynes bent upon him a scrutinizing glance, and then he laughed in an amused sort of way. It was the laugh of the master of the situation.

"Why?" he asked, drawlingly.

But with a slight gesture as if to beg that his appeal should be received in a serious manner, Mark said, earnestly:

"You don't know how hard it is for me to see the looks of cruel disappointment on their pretty faces when as every post comes in I am obliged to say there is nothing for them. Yet I know all the time the letters that would lighten their hearts are in my pocket waiting to be given up to you. They're such sweet young ladies, too; so civil and good tempered." He paused a moment and then went on, with a certain suppressed bitterness: "Since I've been in your power, captain, you've set me a lot of hard tasks, but nothing that goes against me like this."

Haynes laughed again, and his laugh this time was even more disagreeable than the first.

"As I entered the hotel I saw Pouncer," he said,

in a reflective manner, more as if he were speaking to himself than to any one else, "that astute and very clever detective, loitering on the steps. Now, I wonder what he wanted."

The effect of these words upon the waiter was instantaneous and powerful. He began to shake as if suddenly attacked by ague. "You saw him here?" he gasped.

"Yes," returned Rodney, quietly. "Oh, of course, I remember now. He was the nailer that had that Charlton Manor job in hand—the case of manslaughter of a policeman by a burglar interrupted at his work. The culprit got clean away, and has never since been discovered. Pouncer was very raw over his failure, but doesn't despair of capturing him yet."

All thought of protest, of appeal, had now vanished from Mark Blackwood's mind. The slave was once more in the power of his master.

"Hush, for mercy's sake!" he whispered, hoarsely, glancing about him in a paroxysm of terror.

Haynes chuckled to himself. He loved domination, and it was a great gratification for him to see how quickly he had brought this man to his feet.

"If he had only known what I do, eh?" he said, significantly. "If he had only guessed that the identical individual was at this moment engaged as waiter in a high-class and strictly-respectable family hotel?"

"Don't, captain, don't," pleaded the terrified victim of these suppositions, which both knew to be

facts. "You may be overheard. Don't give me away!"

At this Haynes changed from mockery to savage earnestness.

"Then obey me," he said, fiercely. "Obey me, without sign, without word! I tell you, your whole future liberty is in my hands, for, once in the clutches of the law, it would be a lifer! Now, announce me to Miss Carruthers! Go!"

Without a word, but with his skeleton-like face the color of death, Mark picked up the tray and vanished. He was entirely subjugated, and would not dare to disobey any command that the captain might choose to give him.

"Idiot!" sneered Haynes to himself. There was never a man yet who, however much he might rely upon them, did not despise his too-ready tools.

Then the thoughts of this schemer turned toward the object which had brought him to the Burlington. He must win this heiress and all that she represented. But how was it to be managed? He preferred the easier way, but if that failed, as fail it probably would, then he must have recourse to more dangerous but surer methods.

"Miss Carruthers is here, sir."

As Mark made this announcement, he stepped aside to allow of the entrance of Queenie.

Marvelously beautiful, she looked in a gown of gray cloth, trimmed with sable. "Fine feathers make fine birds," says the proverb, and there is much truth in it. But no magnificence of raiment

could have given Queenie that air of high-bred distinction which was one of her natural gifts.

"How do you do, Rodney?" she said, with courtesy, but without warmth of greeting. Then, turning to Mark, she asked, anxiously: "Any letters, waiter?"

"Nothing, miss."

A look of pain came into Queenie's beautiful eyes, and she sighed deeply.

"That will do. You can go."

Mark left the room, but not before a glance, surcharged with meaning, supplicating on the one side and threatening on the other, had passed between him and Captain Haynes.

Queenie chanced to intercept the glance, and as soon as the door had closed behind the waiter, she turned at once to her cousin.

"Did you ever meet that man, before?" she asked, abruptly.

Rodney started slightly, the question was so unexpected. But long experience, in more or less ticklish situations, had taught him self-control.

"Certainly not," he answered, with an admirable assumption of surprise. "Why do you ask?"

"I suppose it's my fancy only, but he always appears to have such a strange look in his eyes when you are here, almost as though you terrified him."

Rodney laughed, an easy, natural laugh. If he could have acted as well on the stage as he did off, he would certainly have made his fortune behind the footlights.

"What a quaint idea," he said as if intensely amused. "Mephistopheles and the student, eh?"

Queenie made no reply. She was by no means satisfied that her first impression had not been the correct one, for she had long ago ceased to place much trust in this cousin of hers.

"But, seriously, Queenie," continued Haynes, approaching her deferentially, "I am here to-day on a very important matter."

"Certainly, Rodney," replied Queenie, promptly, judging the present from the past. "How much? My check book is handy."

To most men this speech, although it was not intended to hurt, would have been a deep humiliation, but Rodney Haynes was callous.

"No, it is not that this time," he said, smiling. "I am afraid your banker has seen me too often."

"Not at all, Rodney," answered Queenie, frankly, really meaning what she said. "I feel to a certain extent that I supplanted you in the possession of this great fortune, and am only too pleased to compensate you so far as my guardian will permit."

"You are ever generous, dear cousin."

Then throwing into his eyes an expression of the deepest tenderness (and it was really admirably done, well calculated to deceive and to have its effect upon any one whose affections were not already engaged), he continued, very earnestly:

"But there are things more precious than rent-rolls and gold, and it is of these I would speak to-day."

"I do not understand you," said Queenie, with a vague feeling of uneasiness.

Haynes drew up two chairs, placing them close together.

"Sit down, Queenie, and hear me patiently."

Queenie hesitated a moment and then seated herself, an example which was at once followed by her cousin.

"We are quite alone, Queenie," he said, determined to play the game, losing one though it might be in the beginning, to the best of his ability, "you and I, the sole survivors of a race honored by six sovereigns and blazoned in the annals of our country's victories."

Queenie had heard much of her family's distinction from Mr. Fuller, and she was proud of all that her ancestors had achieved. Rodney could scarcely have made a more auspicious beginning.

"That is true, Rodney," she said, her cheeks flushing. "Our name and fame were indeed brilliant in the past." She paused a moment, and then a thought striking her, she laid her hand upon his arm, and said more imploringly than upbraidingly. "I trust there is no danger of their being tarnished in the present."

Haynes cast down his eyes as if ashamed of the past and then raised them as if confident of the future.

There is no doubt about it. He certainly was a great actor.

"I admit I have been wild and reckless," he said, "but, since knowing you, all is changed. For I

have grown to love you, Queenie, love you with——"

But Queenie stopped the flow of words by withdrawing the hand he attempted to take, and rising hastily to her feet.

This declaration did not come to her in the nature of a surprise. She had long suspected that something of the sort would happen sooner or later, and she was rather relieved than otherwise that it had come. It gave her an opportunity of putting an end to her cousin's aspirations, and so sparing herself the daily ordeal of his hateful attentions.

"Stop!" she exclaimed. "Say no more. It will only be painful to me and the cause of useless humiliation to yourself."

Haynes rose also, his brow contracted in an ugly frown.

"At least you will give me an answer."

"Certainly if you insist," replied Queenie, firmly. "My answer is No."

Rodney Haynes bit his lip in anger. He had rushed upon his fate, and he knew it. But still he would not desist.

"I have surprised, startled you," he said. "In the future, perhaps——"

"Never!" interrupted Queenie, peremptorily. "I would not marry you if there was not another man in the world. I would die first!"

"May I ask what I have done to incur such enmity?" asked Haynes, with difficulty restraining his anger at this inflexible assertion.

"I do not know that I should call it enmity. I

cannot tell just what it is. It is instinct, I suppose—the common instinct that God has implanted in our hearts to enable us to recognize our friends and warn us of our foes."

Haynes now let his anger master him.

"Ah! you see I am only a private individual," he said, with a bitter sneer. "It's a pity I'm not a Star of the Air in all the glitter of spangles and tinsel."

Queenie's spirit, too, was now aroused. She turned upon him with crimsoned cheeks and flashing, indignant eyes.

"It's a pity you are not a man!" she declared, vehemently. "It's a pity you won't earn an honest livelihood instead of insulting a defenseless girl who has shown nothing but kindness and consideration for you!"

It was a duel now, a duel without fear and without favor.

"You will have to wait until you are of age, my fair cousin, before your montebank can claim you. And in that time your sentiments may undergo a change."

"Never! I would wait for him though it were a lifetime of years, till my hair was white, my eyes dim with age, for I know that he would come to me at last to grasp my trembling hand in his!"

"How do you know that even now he has not found some other love? He has not written a line to you."

Queenie faced him sharply, suspicion amounting to a certainty framing itself in her mind.

"How do you know that?" she demanded.

Rodney Haynes was confused for just a moment. In his excitement, he had said too much. But his natural effrontery soon came to his rescue.

"Well, the servants in the hotel told me so."

"May I ask," said Queenie, drawing herself up proudly, "what necessity there was to canvass my private affairs with the servants?"

"I am your only relative," retorted Haynes, brazening the matter out, "and it is my duty to see that advantage is not taken of your foolishness and inexperience."

Queenie laughed—a short, scornful laugh.

"I thank you for your caution, which I will profit by," she said, sweeping him a sarcastic curtsey.

Then she touched the bell.

"And, as the first step, I order you to leave this room!"

"Have you no fear—" began Haynes, but he was interrupted by the entrance of Mark Blackwood.

It was certainly a marvelously quick answer to Queenie's summons, too quick to be explained in any other way than that the waiter was just outside the door, possibly, very probably, listening.

"Show this gentleman to the door," commanded Queenie, extending her arm with an imperious gesture. "Should he call again, I am not at home."

Mark turned away his head to hide the grin of satisfaction he could not repress. It was with infinite delight that he witnessed the humiliation of this man who held him in his power and who would not relax his grasp.

Haynes caught up his hat, with a smothered malediction.

He bowed with mock courtesy to Queenie, saying: "Our next meeting may be sooner than you imagine, my fair cousin."

Queenie, with head erect, a bright spot burning on each cheek, made no response; and Rodney Haynes got out of the room with what dignity he could.

He was in a savage temper as he went down the stairs, but he would not acknowledge himself beaten. No! This was only the beginning of the battle, the preliminary shots, so to speak. And with the resources he had in reserve, he had little doubt who would be the victor in the end.

Fair means had failed. Now for the other!

CHAPTER XI.

THE BAITING OF THE TRAP.

"Has he gone, Queenie?"

The words were spoken in a half whisper, as Carrie cautiously put her head in at the door leading to the bedroom.

"Yes, dear."

The door was pushed open, and Carrie came into the sitting room, but what a change, at least in outward appearance, from the Carrie of the circus!

Queenie had insisted that her foster sister should have some share in the riches that had been poured into her lap, and Carrie's wardrobe was quite as elaborate as her own.

Carrie was a pretty girl and a girl of innate refinement, and she soon adapted herself to her new surroundings. No one would have guessed, from her air or manner, that her whole life had not been passed in the very best society. But there was something better to be said about her than this—she was honest and true-hearted to the core; once a friend she was a friend forever, and selfishness was a quality which did not enter into her composition.

"I haven't had much experience of swells," she said to Queenie, with an uplifting of her nose, "but that specimen always seems as though he'd just come home from the wash, and the laundress had

put too much starch in his linen. Any letters, dear?"

"No, nothing," sighed Queenie.

"A whole month and not a line from any one," exclaimed Carrie, indignantly. "Those two faithless brutes."

"Oh, hush, Carrie!" said Queenie in a pained tone.

"I can't hush!" retorted Carrie, rebelliously. "I must express my feelings, or I shall break something. Your David is so good and handsome that I thought the wretches of women might have left him alone, but my Sammy's such an ugly little fellow, I knew they'd all go for him."

In spite of the anxiety and pain she felt at her lover's silence, Queenie could not refrain from laughing.

"Why," she said, "I thought it was only the good-looking men who were irresistible to our poor sex."

"Lor, no, dear," replied Carrie, with superior wisdom. "Some of us choose our sweethearts as we do our pug-dogs, for their ugliness. I loved him because he was knock-kneed, bandy-legged, and had hair that you could light matches by. He got cuffed and jumped on all over the circus, and all for my sake; but now, when he comes a cropper, some other girl bathes his poor nose and mends him up with sticking plaster."

As poor Carrie conjured up this heart-rending picture she began to cry, and they were genuine tears of wounded pride and jealousy. Now that she

felt herself forsaken and ill-treated, she began to care for Sammy more than ever. Such is the nature of some women. The old fable to the contrary, the grapes that hang beyond their reach are not sour at all, but the very sweetest in the world.

Queenie put her arms about the sobbing girl, and did her best to comfort her.

"We will believe them both true until we hear from their own lips that they are false," she said tenderly.

And then, in spite of herself, she began to cry herself.

"Where are they? Where are they?" cried a loud, impatient voice just outside the sitting-room door.

Both girls started to their feet, and their tears ceased to flow, as if by magic.

"For goodness sake stand aside, man," went on the voice, with increased irritation.

Then the door was flung open and the portly form of Mrs. Jones stood in the opening.

In another instant Queenie and Carrie were enfolded in her motherly embrace, while she panted out in the intervals of her kisses:

"Oh, you naughty, darling, good-for-nothing girls, how could you serve us all so?"

After the first raptures of meeting were over, Mrs. Jones' hat and wrap were removed by affectionate hands, and the good lady was comfortably established upon the sofa, with Queenie on one side and Carrie on the other.

"There, now that I have had a good hug," she

said, with a sigh of contentment, "let's have a look at you both. Lor, now, what stylish gowns! But," scrutinizing their faces more attentively, "the London air doesn't seem to agree with you, for neither of you look well. And—and you've both been crying."

"It's nothing, mother," replied Carrie, turning away her head a little. And then she asked suddenly, more to change the subject than anything else:

"Where's father?"

"Oh, my dear, I had to leave him behind to mind the show. We have decided to keep on until the cold weather sets in. But business has not been very brisk since we lost our little White Queen, so he sent me to London in search of novelties."

A question had been trembling upon Queenie's lips ever since Mrs. Jones' first appearance, and now she could no longer resist the desire to ask it.

"I hope Dave—Mr. Engleheart—is quite well."

"And I trust Sam—Mr. Blythe—has broken his neck," supplemented Carrie with a vicious intonation, although she was almost as anxious for news as was Queenie.

The whole expression of Mrs. Jones' face changed and became hard and forbidding.

"However you two girls had the cheek to ask after those poor young fellows gets over me," she exclaimed indignantly. "I could never have believed, Queenie, that riches could have so altered you. And as for you, my girl," turning to Carrie, "you'll just march home with me, and your father will talk to you as they do in his native Italy.

The astonishment of her hearers at this speech was supreme.

"Why, mother," cried Queenie, "what do you mean? We've both written every day."

"Yes, and twice on Sundays," added Carrie.

It was now Mrs. Jones' turn to be astonished. She knew her daughters (for Queenie would always be a daughter to her) too well to doubt their word for a single instant.

"You have! Then all I can say is that not one of them has ever reached Signor Jonesio's Grand Cosmopolitan Circus. And the money those two poor lads"—Mrs. Jones' feelings toward Sammy had, in her pity for him, undergone a revulsion, and she was inclined now to favor the match with her daughter rather than oppose it—"and the amount of money those two poor lads spent in postage stamps, waiting for every post with white faces and broken hearts!"

A wave of pity swept over Queenie, only to be swallowed up by another and far greater wave of joy and relief. Dave was true to her! His love was still hers!

"But, Queenie," exclaimed Carrie, after her first moment of surprise, "what on earth can have become of the letters?"

"I think I can guess, dear," replied Queenie, quietly, although her gentle heart was filled with unaccustomed anger and indignation at the suspicion which had dawned upon her, "but we'll see to that later."

"Well, as I said to Sammy in the train," began Mrs. Jones.

Carrie jumped to her feet.

"In the train!" she interrupted excitedly. "What, is he with you?"

"Lord! You don't think I'd trust myself in London alone! Why, I haven't been here since I rode bare-backed before the Prince of Wales, when——"

But Carrie, who was never very tolerant of her mother's reminiscences, was less inclined than ever to be so at the present moment.

"Never mind that, mother," she interrupted again, even more impatiently than before. "Where is he now?"

"Well," replied Mrs. Jones, half laughing and half anxious, "should there be anything left of him, I think you'll find it outside on the pavement. I last saw him there having a fight with the cabman."

Carrie darted toward the door, but before she could reach it, it was opened, and the young gentleman in question appeared, led by the waiter.

And a most disreputable object he was. His clothes were covered with mud, his hat crushed in, his nose bleeding and his eyes decidedly damaged.

"Are you there, missus?" he asked, blinking pitifully, as the waiter discreetly retired.

"Of course I'm here!" answered Mrs. Jones with a sniff. "Can't you see me?"

But that was just the point. Unlucky Sammy could not see her nor any one else at that moment. In a forlorn voice, he proceeded to tell the story of

his misfortunes. How he had come to blows with the cabman in an altercation over the fare, and had emerged decidedly the worse from the encounter.

"But, oh, missus," he concluded, "have you found 'em?"

"Of course I have," replied Mrs. Jones, cheerfully. "Queenie and Carrie are here."

Sammy's face, dilapidated as it was, assumed an expression of delight, and, with arms outstretched, he began feeling about as one does when playing blind man's buff.

But, unfortunately, he caught the wrong person. It was Mrs. Jones' ample figure he enveloped in his embrace.

"Oh, Carrie, Carrie!" he exclaimed, rapturously. And then he added in amazement and with a distinct note of dissatisfaction, "but ain't you put on flesh since I last held you in these arms!"

Mrs. Jones pushed him indignantly away.

"Don't be a fool!" she ejaculated, snappishly.

This uncomplimentary appellation filled Sammy with dismay at his mistake, but still he managed to plead piteously:

"Won't you come to me, Carrie. Pity the poor blind!"

Queenie had been laughing. But now, her heart, which was always open to sympathy, reproached her for being amused at another's woes, however comical they might be.

"Come, Carrie," she pleaded, "go and comfort him."

"Comfort that!" exclaimed Carrie, disgustedly.

"Look at him! A pretty article to fret about for a whole month, ain't he?"

Sammy tried to grope his way toward her, murmuring tragically:

"I cannot gaze upon her, but I can feel her voice."

Then Carrie relented somewhat, and, crossing to him, she took him by the arm.

"Yes," she said, a smile gradually appearing upon her pretty face, "and, if you weren't such a pretty specimen of broken crockery ware, you should feel her hand. Come here, do!"

This was quite like old times, and Sammy submissively allowed himself to be seated in a chair and to have Carrie, with her handkerchief, make him a little more presentable.

Seeing that peace was likely to be restored between these two, Queenie turned to Mrs. Jones.

"And now, mother dear," she said, "come to my room, and make yourself comfortable."

"That I will," replied Mrs. Jones, heartily, "for I'm dying for a cup of tea."

"You shall have it at once, dear. And you shall tell me all the news of the dear old circus, and—and——" hesitating a little, "of him."

She put her arm affectionately within that of her adopted mother, and led her away.

"There!" said Carrie, giving a final dab at Sammy's face. "Can you see better now?"

"Yes," he replied, delightedly, "there you are, Carrie! Wait a minute! One, two, three, four

Carries, floating on clouds and stars shooting all over you!"

"Well never mind the clouds and stars, or the other Carries. I guess this one will be enough for you."

She seated herself by his side, and Sammy could see quite well enough to steal his arm about her waist. She did not repulse him, but asked with genuine interest:

"How are you getting on in the profession, Sammy?"

"Oh, splendidly!" But his tone belied the words. "Becoming quite a favorite. Only had one egg thrown at me last Saturday."

"But how could they spare you from the show?"

"Oh," ruefully, "the boss said perhaps they'd take more money if I was away."

Carrie burst into a merry peal of laughter, which, in spite of the fact that it was at his expense, was music in Sammy's ears; he had so long been a stranger to it.

Then Carrie had a score of questions to ask about her old associates, and there was some little talk, too, about their own future.

Finally she insisted that he should come and have his bruises properly washed and dressed.

"Yes, indeed," assented Sammy, eagerly. "It will be like the dear old days."

But Carrie, just as they were about to leave the room, suddenly paused, and, turning upon him a scrutinizing look, asked severely:

"Yes, but who's been bathing your crushed features since I've been away?"

"No one, Carrie, I swear it!" asseverated Sammy, with the utmost intensity of which he was capable, and without committing perjury. "I've been saving it all up for you."

Carrie laughed, but she was satisfied.

And so it happened that when Queenie returned to the sitting-room, after Mrs. Jones, tired with her journey, had dropped off to sleep, she found it unoccupied.

She was not sorry for this, for she wanted to be alone for a while with her own thoughts. All that Mrs. Jones had told her had made her supremely happy. The troubles that had beset her, vanished, as clouds roll away and disperse to give place to sunshine. The man she loved loved her. This was enough for her in the present, and for the future as well, no matter what it might bring, if he still continued to love her. And he would, he would! Never again should the slightest doubt be allowed to assail her. She was as sure of him as she was of herself.

Not long, however, was fate to permit her to indulge in these happy reflections.

She was aroused from her day dreams by a rap upon the door, followed by the entrance of the waiter, Mark Blackwood.

He carried a silver salver, upon which reposed a letter.

He gave one quick glance about the room to be sure that Miss Carruthers was alone, and then advanced toward her.

"Beg pardon, miss," he said, deferentially, "but a messenger has just arrived with this note, and bade me give it to you at once, as it is a matter of life and death."

Queenie rose hastily, her sweet face paling. Life and death! What could it mean?

She took the letter, tore open the envelope, and, with rapidly beating heart, read as follows:

Helliwell Mansion, Pace street, Piccadilly.

Dear Madam:—I regret to inform you that a very serious cab accident has this morning occurred just outside my house. A gentleman was violently thrown out and so seriously injured that it was deemed unsafe to remove him to the hospital, so I had him carried into my dwelling where he is now lying in a precarious condition. From his card, I gather that he is a circus performer named David Engleheart. There is no further means of identifying him except an unposted letter addressed to yourself. If he is a friend of yours, please come at once or it may be too late. Yours sincerely, Mary Sargent.

No news could be more terrible than this, coming, as it did, in the very midst of the happy relief from the anxiety which had been torturing her for weeks past.

She swayed a little and turned so white that Mark Blackwood, who for reasons of his own had remained in the room, thought she was about to faint.

"Excuse me, miss," he hastened to say, "but the messenger is waiting outside in a cab for your answer."

These words restored the distracted girl partially to herself. Her head was whirling, her heart was throbbing wildly. There was but one thing to be done. She must go to him without delay.

She caught up her hat, which happened to be lying upon the table.

"I will return with the messenger instantly," she said to the waiter in a husky voice.

But she must leave some word for her friends.

She seated herself at a little desk in the room, and hastily wrote the following line:

David is in danger. I go to him. Queenie.

As she rose from the desk, she dropped upon the floor, unperceived either by herself or by Mark Blackwood, the letter which had summoned her away.

Her mind was in a tumult. Was she to be united again to the man she loved only to part with him forever? Heaven grant that she be in time to hear his dear voice, to bid him live or to take her with him to the land of shadows!

With this prayer in her heart, she swept past the waiter and from the room.

As his eyes followed her, Mark Blackwood's dark, sullen face grew darker and more sullen still.

"The bait has taken!" he thought to himself. "Another piece of dirty work for you, Rodney Haynes! My side of the ledger is nearly filled! One day I may want a settlement!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE SCENT OF DANGER.

Mr. Samuel Blythe and his sweetheart were seated side by side and hand in hand upon the sofa in the sitting-room.

After the skilful ministrations of Carrie, a science gained by long experience, Sammy really looked quite like himself. He bore but few traces of the recent fracas. Moreover, he was radiant with delight, for she had never been so kind to him before, and he had almost persuaded her to promise definitely that she would one day become his wife.

It was therefore with feelings of unmixed disgust that he saw the door of Queenie's bedroom open and his future mother-in-law appear.

She was really a very nice old lady, but why couldn't she have staid away just a little longer?

With a blush, Carrie snatched away her hand and withdrew to the very further end of the sofa. She knew only too well from past experience that her mother did not approve of Sammy as a suitor, and she by no means realized Mrs. Jones' recent change of heart.

She expected nothing less than a rare scolding, in which Sammy, of course, would come in for his share.

But Mrs. Jones scarcely glanced at them. She was

not thinking just then of her daughter's matrimonial ventures, advantageous or otherwise.

She was more or less worried over quite another matter.

Upon awakening a few minutes before, she had rung the bell and asked for Miss Carruthers, only to be informed that that young lady was not in the hotel.

She thought it rather strange that Queenie should have gone away and left her alone, especially as it was doubtful how long her stay was to be. So, she hastened to find Carrie and question her.

"Where is Queenie?" she asked abruptly.

"Queenie!" echoed Carrie, in surprise. "Why, I thought she was with you."

"Well, she's not," with the testiness of growing anxiety. "More than that, she's not in the hotel."

At this Carrie, beginning to be alarmed in her turn, rose to her feet. She knew that Queenie never went out alone, even in the daytime, and now it was already dark. Her alarm was increased when she saw that Queenie's hat was gone.

Then, her quick eye caught sight of the slip of paper upon the desk.

She hurried over, caught it up, and read aloud:

David is in danger. I go to him. Queenie.

"What does she mean?" ejaculated Mrs. Jones. "David in danger. Why, he's safe at the show down in Reading."

"It looks like a plant," observed Sammy, sententiously.

As she heard this, Carrie started as if she had been shot, and her color faded. With a rapidity of thought quicker than words, she had put two and two together. When she had accompanied Queenie to London, she had determined to be so vigilant, and yet she had allowed herself to be overreached.

"Yes," she cried excitedly, "and I'll wager the captain's at the bottom of it!"

Mrs. Jones was just about to demand an explanation of these words, when the waiter announced Mr. Furnaby Fuller.

The troubled lady recognized the lawyer at once, and she started toward him with an exclamation of relief and hope.

"Oh! Thank goodness, here's somebody that can advise us!"

Mr. Fuller looked from one to the other in mild surprise. He saw at once that something out of the common course had occurred, but his face remained almost impassive. He was accustomed to deal with all sorts and conditions of men, and had learned on most occasions to wear a mask.

"You appear agitated," he said, in his slow, grave tones. "I wish to see Miss Carruthers."

"You can't, sir," said Carrie, with a catch in her voice, at the same time clasping her hands nervously together. "She's gone."

"Gone!" repeated the lawyer, raising his eyebrows slightly and by no means understanding. "What do you mean?"

Carrie handed him Queenie's short and unsatisfactory note.

"See, sir; she left this during our absence. But she must have been decoyed away on false pretences, as Mr. Engleheart is safe and well down at Reading."

Mr. Fuller read the note over carefully twice. Then he began to share the anxiety of the others. The old gentleman had become most sincerely attached to his ward, and he would have felt it deeply should any misfortune befall her.

"It's most extraordinary," he acknowledged gravely, and then he gave a rapid order. "Ring for the waiter!"

Mrs. Jones at once obeyed, and touched the electric bell.

"She can't have left the hotel without being noticed," said Mr. Fuller, reflectively.

Mrs. Jones was about to speak and tell what she had heard, when Mark Blackwood appeared in answer to the summons. In fact, he had been just outside, expecting something of the sort.

Mr. Fuller gave the clean shaven, hatchet faced man one quick, sharp glance, and then he asked abruptly:

"When did you see Miss Carruthers last?"

"About half an hour ago, sir."

"You told me an hour!" exclaimed Mrs. Jones.

"Well, it might have been, ma'am," returned Mark, respectfully. "I've got a bad memory."

Sammy Blythe, who was listening with all his ears, thought to himself that he would bet it was a mighty convenient one as well, and this opinion was shared by the more experienced and more astute lawyer.

"Did you see her go out?" asked Mr. Fuller.

"No, sir. Not exactly. That is, I saw her go down stairs with her hat on."

"That will do. You may go."

Mark turned to leave the room, but as he did so, his eye fell upon a folded sheet of paper that lay upon the carpet, and it flashed upon him that this might be the decoy letter, and that it behooved him to secure it. He sidled toward it, stooped and picked it up.

But, before he could thrust it into his pocket it was snatched from his hand by Sammy Blythe, who had witnessed the whole proceeding.

"That belongs to your betters!" cried the successful captor triumphantly.

Mark bit his lip angrily, and he made a slight movement as if he would seek to recover the prize. But he evidently thought better of this idea, for a second afterward, he stepped back, and said in the monotonous tones of a well-trained servant:

"Beg pardon, sir, thought it was waste paper."

But, when he was alone in the hall outside, he muttered to himself, angry at his own lack of success:

"He'll read the address, then the game's up. The captain must be warned."

Evidently Mark Blackwood did not consider that the time had yet come in which to shake off his master's thralldom.

His surmise, however, was perfectly correct, for Sammy Blythe did open the letter at once. After a hasty perusal of its contents, he cried out exultantly.

"Here's where she's gone to—Helliwell Mansion, Pace street, Piccadilly."

To Mrs. Jones and Carrie this was an address and nothing more, but to Mr. Fuller it opened up the most terrible possibilities. For once, the lawyer was shaken out of his usual calmness.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed, excitedly. "Then the matter is far more serious than I imagined, and the girl is in deadly peril."

There was something in his manner that was even more terrifying than his words, and the others, pale with apprehension, gathered about him.

"What do you mean?" they demanded in unison.

Mr. Fuller did not keep them in suspense, but at once imparted to them the information he possessed.

"Helliwell Mansion is notorious as one of the worst of all the aristocratic dens of infamy in London. It is frequented by the most debauched, and only this morning the papers declare that it's existence is a crying shame and disgrace to the metropolis."

Mrs. Jones and Carrie shrank back in horror at the thought of Queenie in such a place. But upon Sammy Blythe's homely face was a look of new found determination that made it almost handsome.

"That's good enough for me!" he exclaimed. "Good-by, Carrie."

Carrie, who understood what was in his mind, rushed to him, and caught him by the arm.

"Sammy, don't be a fool," she said in a trembling voice. "It's no good you going there by yourself."

"Isn't it? You wait and see, my girl."

"But what are you going to do?"

"Find out if I suit!"

And, before she could say anything more to dissuade him from his purpose, which, truth to tell, was as single hearted as that of any champion of old, he had shaken off her grasp and dashed from the room.

"What in the world can the boy mean?" gasped Mrs. Jones.

But it was no time to discuss this. Matters were entirely too grave, as Mr. Fuller felt.

"There is only one thing to be done," he said, his tone and manner full of disquietude. "Go at once to Scotland Yard, and obtain a warrant to search the Mansion."

"And in the meantime," wailed Carrie, "Queenie, my own dear sister, may become their victim."

Mrs. Jones, the tears rolling down her plump cheeks, wrung her hands in helpless torture.

"My poor child!" she faltered. "Who can help us to rescue you?"

As if this appeal had been heard and answered by some unseen power, almost immediately the voice of the waiter was heard, announcing Mr. David Engleheart.

And David stood there before them, looking every inch the gentleman he was in a new and fashionable suit, and with a look of eager expectancy upon his handsome face.

Carrie and her mother started toward him with cries of "David! David!"

"Yes, David," he replied, his eyes wandering about the room in search of some one who was not there. "Forgive me for not warning you of my arrival, but I could endure the suspense no longer. This silence was slowly driving me mad. So, after your departure, Mrs. Jones, I took the next train. I wanted to hear from her own lips whether she was true or false, whether the coming of this great fortune had turned her heart from me."

"No, my poor David," said Mrs. Jones, with a sob. "Her heart is as true, good and kind as when we called her our little White Queen. But—but—tell him, Carrie."

And the big-hearted woman broke down completely.

David's roving eyes were instantly riveted upon their faces, and his own cheeks were blanched with a sudden agony of fear.

"Why, what is it?" he exclaimed in low, tense tones. "You are both weeping. It cannot be—— My God, it isn't death!"

"Oh, no, David, not that," Carrie hastened to reply, controlling herself as well as possible. "Perhaps nothing at all serious, but we are a little frightened, and—and——"

David caught her by the shoulder and absolutely shook her in the torture of his suspense. He neither thought nor cared whether he were hurting her or not, he who had always been gentle courtesy itself to women. But, in his agony, he had become almost a savage, with one object in view, to discover the truth without delay.

But here, fortunately, Mr. Fuller intervened, speaking in clear, full tones that did much to restore David to himself, even while the words uttered caused him the most intense solicitude and alarm.

"Miss Carruthers, sir," said the lawyer, "under the pretence that you had met with an accident, has been decoyed to a notorious gambling den called Helliwell Mansion."

David's hand fell from Carrie's shoulder, and for an instant he stood perfectly motionless. Then he said slowly, and with manifest effort:

"Helliwell Mansion! Why, that is the place which, quite by accident, we discovered Hilda Corrode had made for, when she vanished from the circus."

As she heard this, Carrie recovered her composure. Dashing the tears from her eyes, she cried:

"Then I was right! Captain Haynes is at the bottom of this. They're working together. I knew it from something I heard them say at Blackburn."

"Heaven help the poor girl!" ejaculated Mr. Fuller. "What can we do?"

David turned toward him, his splendid figure erect, and his eyes gleaming with suppressed passion.

"What can we do? Go to the place and demand her!"

"But think of the danger," protested Mr. Fuller.

"What do I care for the danger? The life and honor of the woman I love are in peril, and I will not leave one brick standing upon another till I have found her."

And he certainly looked as if he would accomplish

his purpose. Surely no woman ever had a braver or more devoted lover. He was worthy in every respect of the lady of his heart, the lovely girl who had given herself into his keeping.

Mr. Fuller was impressed, and yet, cautious as he was by nature and training, he shook his head despondently.

"You will be but one against many."

"I do not fear them!" cried David, in clarion tones of defiance. "Let them but bar my way, and they shall see what a single arm, hardened by manly training and cleanly living, can do against their shattered frames, weakened in the unhallowed sin of a great city! It will be God help those who seek to keep her from me!"

CHAPTER XIII.

TWO WOMEN AND A MAN.

In a small street leading from one of London's most famous and aristocratic thoroughfares was situated the place known as the Helliwell Mansion. It was a large and handsome house which had formerly belonged to one of the nobility.

There was nothing in its external appearance to indicate its character, nothing to show how many lives had been wrecked there, how many had entered its portals, happy and well-to-do, only to be thrown out in the gray dawn, ruined and hopeless.

A shrewd looker-on, however, who should stand across the street for half an hour any evening in the week, would have formed a pretty clear idea of the nature of the place. All the curtains were closely drawn, but still there were gleams of light from every window. The number of visitors was large, too large for a private house, and while many of the men were irreproachable so far as their appearance went, all the women were too flashily dressed and wore too many jewels. Moreover, the policeman on that beat, watched the house narrowly, pausing frequently before it. All of which, to the initiated, would be suspicious, to say the least of it.

The interior of the house was gorgeous in the extreme, resplendent with gilding, mirrors and furni-

ture covered with velvet and brocade of vivid hues. The second floor was the place where most of the business went on. It consisted of a large reception room out of which opened a half-dozen or so smaller rooms, devoted to gambling and wine parties.

In this glittering reception room we shall find one evening the virtual, though not ostensible, proprietor of the place, Captain Rodney Haynes.

The captain was alone in the reception room, but from behind two or three of the closed doors came occasional bursts of hysterical laughter, although it was still early in the evening.

Haynes was in high good humor to-night. He had just heard from a man he had posted in front of the Burlington Hotel that the bait had taken and his cousin had driven off in the cab evidently en route for the Helliwell Mansion. Once inside, those innocent eyes of hers would open with surprise and fear, and then he would know how to tame her. To cage the bird was the chief thing.

"Well, has she arrived yet?" asked a cold, though musical voice.

He turned to see standing behind him the woman he had installed as mistress of the place.

Hilda Corrode was superbly dressed in yellow satin and black lace, and looked very handsome in spite of the weary, discontented expression her features wore.

She had obeyed Haynes' instructions, and was ready to obey them still further, but there were moments when she hated herself for doing so. Then,

this life of gilded vice had become thoroughly distasteful to her.

She had longed for domestic peace and she had attained—*this*.

"Has she arrived yet?" she repeated.

"No, not yet," answered Haynes. "But it's all right. She's started."

"I pray she may come soon, lest my resolution should fail."

"Don't be a fool!" said Haynes, sharply. "Virtuous airs don't become you."

Hilda's nostrils quivered and her black eyes flashed. She might be his slave, but she hated him and was not afraid of him.

"Always a sneer for a word of good, an honest thought," she said, with bitter contempt, contempt for him, contempt for herself. "But I tell you that a very few years ago I was as innocent as the girl we are luring here to-night, and the thought of what I was then and am now racks my heart with remorse."

"Bosh!" retorted Haynes, with a gesture of impatience. "In the morning she will become my wife."

"Then let her pray for death, for her life will be a hell!"

Haynes flushed angrily, but he kept his temper. This woman was useful to him. After her work was done, he would recall those words, and then she could starve for all he cared. His promises? With such a man as Rodney Haynes, promises went for nothing.

"You seem to forget the reward for your share of the work," he said, insinuatingly.

Instantly there was a change in Hilda's manner.

"No! no!" she exclaimed, passionately. "Let me think only of that, and I shall be adamant. Money, my child, and the man I love."

"All shall be yours."

She looked at him as if she would read his very soul.

"You swear it?"

"On my word of honor."

Knowing Haynes as she did, the ghastly sarcasm of this declaration was only too apparent to her.

"Honor!" she repeated, with a scornful curl of her too red lip. "Between us two honor is but an empty word."

Again the captain's ire nearly got the better of him, but, before he could reply, there appeared a flunkey in a livery of scarlet; an appropriate color for the house.

"A Miss Carruthers desires to see the mistress," he said.

Haynes' anger vanished, to be replaced by a fiendish joy, the sort of delight that Satan must feel as he sees a soul gradually drifting within his power.

"At last!" he exclaimed. "Admit her!"

Then, turning to Hilda, he said rapidly and commandingly:

"No faltering now! Go into the large supper room. We'll let her get a taste of Helliwell Mansion before she sees us."

He took the half hesitating woman by the arm and drew her away.

When Queenie in her feverish anxiety, hurriedly entered the room, she found it deserted. Her disappointment was intense. The servant had told her that she would find the mistress of the house there. It seemed to her as if she could not wait another instant. Oh, why didn't they take her to David? Where was he? Where was he? Perhaps calling her name in his agony, and she so near, yet could not find him!

A burst of laughter rang out from one of the rooms.

Queenie started and listened. There must be a party going on. Perhaps she ought to have gone into that room.

She approached the door, softly opened it, and stood transfixed at the sight that met her eyes.

Gathered about a table, sparkling with glass and silver, was a party of six or eight, composed of both sexes.

At the head of the table stood a young man with flushed face, and rather unsteady upon his legs.

"Now, then," he was saying, "let's have another bottle of fizz. Maudie, my dear girl, you're a brick."

"Of course I am," answered a female voice, to the accompaniment of a boisterous laugh. "You all know that, don't you, boys and girls?"

Shocked and trembling with a vague fear, Queenie closed the door, without being observed by the revelers, and shrank back as if to avoid something

which she felt was contamination, and yet did not exactly understand why.

What strange people. In what kind of a place did she find herself? Her first impulse was to fly from the house. But no, David was there. That was the only thing that must be considered. She turned, intending to ring for a servant, and saw standing near the entrance of one of the other rooms a striking vision in black and yellow.

Ah! at last! This must be the mistress of the house.

She raised her eyes to the face of the woman, and then in amazement she recognized her. With a glad cry, she started toward her, with outstretched hands.

"Hilda Corrode! Is it possible? Thank Heaven, I have found a friend! Dear, dear Hilda, how glad I am to see you."

But Hilda, with a fierce look in her dark eyes, calmly placed her hands behind her back. The appearance of this girl, who she had forced herself to believe had robbed her of her happiness, had roused in her all her worst passions. All softer emotions had fled. She thought now only of revenge.

Queenie paused, pained and bewildered at this hostile rceeption.

"How strangely you look at me!" she faltered. "Are we not friends?"

"Friends with you!" replied Hilda, with concentrated hatred. "At last I can meet you honestly, meet you without playing the hypocrite for the sake of a miserable pittance. Meet you and tell you I hate

you with an intensity so great that I could strike you where you stand!"

And she partially raised one white arm as if to carry her threat into execution.

Horrified, amazed, terrified, Queenie looked at her in a sort of fascination.

"Don't, don't!" she stammered. "You frighten me. What have I ever done to you?"

Hilda Corrode laughed, a harsh, repellant laugh, in which there was no trace of mirth.

"You can ask me that? What have you done? Taken from me the man I love, a wrong that no woman ever forgot or forgave!"

From behind the closed door of the room into which Queenie had glanced, now came the confused sound of a Bacchanalian chorus.

Queenie was indistinctly conscious of it. But she gave it no thought. Her mind was occupied with only two things, to elucidate the mystery of Hilda's words, and to find David.

"The man you love!" she repeated. "There is some mistake, Hilda. I love no one but David Engleheart. He is in this house, ill, perhaps dying. Ah! take me to him, and I will forgive your wild words."

Hilda smiled, and the smile struck a chill to the heart of the unhappy girl before her.

"Poor simple dupe!" she sneered. "Look around you! Does this look like a hospital for the sick? Listen! Do you think those howling men and women care for the maimed and wounded?"

Queenie, pale as death, and with her beautiful eyes distended in horror, gasped out:

"In Heaven's name, tell me where I am!"

Hilda Corrode paused a moment before replying in order to give her words their full effect, and then she said, slowly and triumphantly:

"In a house whose real life is when decent London sleeps."

Shivering from head to foot and with an inarticulate murmur, Queenie covered her white face with her hands.

She understood at last. David was not there. It was all a trick, of which she had been the easy victim.

Hilda, with folded arms, watched her, gloating over the misery of her successful rival.

At last the hands fell, and Queenie, raising her head, drew herself up proudly.

"Why have I been brought to a place like this?" she demanded.

"That you shall be told by another," answered Hilda, shortly. "But understand that until daybreak you are a prisoner."

Until daybreak! A prisoner! Oh, no, that was too horrible! And Queenie, her very soul revolted, appealed for pity, for mercy, as a drowning man clutches at a straw. And the straw would be of quite as much service to the drowning man as Hilda Corrode would be at that supreme moment to Queenie Carruthers.

"Hilda," pleaded the distracted girl, battling for what she realized dimly was far more precious than

life. "Hilda, do you remember in our old circus days when you lay low with the fever, when no one would go near you but I, for all feared the fell disease? I nursed you and loved you in your peril, and brought you back to life. I now am in peril, in peril that passes death. Oh! help me! Friend to friend and woman to woman! I kneel and beg you to pity and save me!"

She sank on her knees in an agony of supplication.

Hilda Corrode hesitated, but only for an instant. Then the image of David Engleheart rose up before her, and her heart became as steel. She bent over the kneeling girl, and hissed into her ear:

"Pity you, when my heart is torn with jealous rage! Save you, so that he can hold you in his arms! Won't you see the passion that is consuming me? I love him, David Engleheart—do you hear?—love him with an intensity and strength that stifles, maddens me!"

Queenie rose slowly to her feet. She understood how hopeless further supplication would be. Sweet and gentle as she was by nature, she was by no means devoid of spirit, nor was she a coward. She was no longer pale; a bright spot glowed in each cheek, and in the beautiful eyes, which she fixed fearlessly upon the woman who was seeking to compass her ruin, there burned a clear, steady light.

"Now I can guess your purpose," she said, bravely, almost defiantly. "You think these gaudy surroundings, the companionship of those few, lost degraded creatures can corrupt my soul, and unfit me for an honest man's wife. These may have tempted

you, Hilda Corrode, but, weak as you think me, you will find I am made of sterner stuff."

"You do not know what means——"

"I care not for the means," interrupted Queenie, strong now in her own purity. "I shall have the face of the man I love, the fear of God, before my eyes, and these will sustain me!"

"The days of miracles are past, my dear," retorted Hilda, contemptuously. "No one has ever left this house sinless."

All Queenie's womanhood was now up in arms. Who would have recognized the little White Queen in the superb creature who turned upon her tormentor, and spoke scathing words of denunciation?

"You threaten me with such a fate! Show some shame, woman! Take off those clothes, cast away those jewels! You bear upon you the receipt of the loss of your soul!"

Trembling with rage, Hilda screamed:

"You dare say this to me?"

But Queenie never flinched.

"I dare to tell you that to breathe the same air with you is poison," she went on, dauntlessly, "to even hear your voice an outrage upon decency! Nor am I so weak and frightened as you thought me? Now do you think I shall readily fall into any of your infamous snares? Now, who quails most, you or I?"

A mad woman in her fury at these taunts, Hilda caught up a heavy candlestick from a table which stood near her.

But before she could carry out her purpose and

launch the missile, a voice called out in stern command:

"Stop that!"

Involuntarily, Hilda's arm dropped to her side, and then, brought to her senses, she muttered sullenly:

"Let her curb her tongue, then!"

Queenie turned in the direction whence the voice proceeded, and, with a mixture of joy and fear recognized her cousin, Rodney Haynes. Was he to be her deliverer or her jailer?

As soon as he saw that Hilda had obeyed and the threatened danger was over, Haynes turned, locked the door by which he had entered and put the key in his pocket. It was the door which led into the hall.

Queenie came toward him, seeking to read his face.

"Rodney," she said, "you cannot be in this infamous plot! You are my cousin, our parents were brother and sister, you hold the position of an officer and a gentleman. In the name of the sovereign lady whose subjects you are paid to defend, I command you to take me from this house."

Haynes looked at her a moment in silence, his eyes gloating over her presence there. Then he said, calmly:

"Yes, I will do so."

Queenie clasped her hands ecstatically, with an exclamation of joy and gratitude.

But her happiness was destined to be shortlived.

"In the morning," added Haynes, just as quietly as he had spoken before,

A chuckling laugh of satisfaction broke from Hilda Corrode's lips.

Queenie turned and gazed at her fixedly.

"Don't laugh yet, Hilda!" she said, in low, clear tones. "Wait!"

Hilda made no reply. There was something in the depths of those pure eyes that filled her with shame. But she thrust the feeling angrily from her.

"Now, Rodney," continued Queenie, "tell me what you mean."

"I mean that here you will remain," replied Haynes, promptly. "No harm will threaten you, but I shall take care that there are those outside who will see you go forth, and in their eyes and the eyes of all the world you will be dishonored."

"And what will the Noble Star of the Air say when we tell him how his White Queen has fallen?" mocked Hilda.

Quick as a flash came the spirited answer:

"He will call you a liar and knock that man down!"

"He may do all that," answered Hilda, "but will he be content to marry you?"

"I think not," put in Haynes, "and when you see the face of society turned against you, you will be only too thankful to accept the man you rejected so scornfully to-day."

Any plea for mercy would be worse than useless. It would be absurd. As well might a white dove caught in the talons of a hawk expect to be released.

Queenie, with sinking heart, fully realized this, and a wild, mad desire for escape took possession of

her. Like a lapwing she flew toward the door, which had furnished her entrance to this horrible place. But it resisted all her efforts.

"Locked, my dear," laughed Haynes, "and here is the key!"

Queenie rushed to another door, but the loud voices and ribald laughter drove her back from this.

"Yes, go there, do," said Haynes. "You might make some nice acquaintances."

Queenie paid no attention. It is doubtful if she heard him. Her sole thought was to be free from their hateful presence.

She tried another door. It yielded to her touch.

"That's open," said Haynes, grinning. "You can go in there, for beyond the room there is no outlet."

Queenie turned upon the threshold.

"I thank you," she said, simply. "I shall at least be alone, and will pray to one who surely hears you now, and is ever ready to protect the innocent from the snares of the guilty."

She disappeared, closing the door behind her, and the room which had been purified by her presence, returned to its former aspect of glittering sin.

Rodney advanced and locked the door, exclaiming as he did so in vindictive triumph:

"And there you will remain, my fair cousin, a prisoner!"

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE TOILS.

"Hush! what's that?"

It was just after Queenie had been made a captive, and it was Hilda Corrode's voice that uttered the words.

The cause of her exclamation was a loud knocking upon the hall door.

Haynes hesitated a moment, and then tossed her the key.

"Open it!" he said, briefly.

Hilda obeyed, and a man, with a smooth face and a sharp nose, entered precipitately.

"Mark Blackwood!" exclaimed Haynes and Hilda simultaneously, both scenting danger from this man's appearance.

"Haven't a minute to spare," panted Mark, hurriedly. "That chap, her sweetheart, has found it all out."

This was indeed serious news, news that might cause the undoing of all those well laid, and, up to this point successful, plans.

"How?" demanded Haynes, shortly.

"She dropped the letter," replied Mark, in the same jerky way. "He's on his way here now. I rushed up to warn you in time."

"Is he alone?"

"I think so. Can't stop, or I shall be missed at the hotel. But for all our sakes, be careful."

And he vanished as rapidly as he had come.

The two conspirators looked at each other for a moment in dumb consternation.

Then Haynes asked lamely:

"What's to be done now?"

Hilda did not immediately reply. She was reflecting. But woman's wits are proverbially quicker than man's, and this is especially so in times of danger, that is, if the woman is possessed of any wits at all; and Hilda Corrode, whatever her failings might be, was certainly not destitute of brains.

Finally she said abruptly:

"What's to be done? Bring matters to a crisis."

"But how?" asked Haynes, in a puzzled way.

"She is there safe. Come to my room. I will give you a drug to silence her. Get those drunken idiots out of that room, and we'll arrange a pretty little tableau for Mr. Engleheart's benefit. Come, quick, or it will be too late."

Scarcely were they gone, when the door of one of the supper rooms was opened, and a head was cautiously thrust in, soon followed by the whole body.

The new-comer was a young man, with a blonde mustache and long side whiskers, and dressed in the height of fashion.

He had been eavesdropping for the last quarter of an hour, and that without a qualm of conscience. Indeed, there were far worse things than listening at key-holes that Sammy Blythe would have indulged

in, if, by so doing, he could succeed in the scheme he had entered upon.

For the fashionable young man was no more nor less than the redoubtable Sammy.

After leaving the Burlington, he had hastened to a costumer's with whom he had had dealings when he was a clerk in he city and used to indulge in private theatricals. He explained what he wanted and was soon turned out as a full-fledged swell. A very creditable make-up it was, too.

He then took a cab and drove to the Helliwell Mansion. His object, of course, was to obtain an entrance. Fortunately, he had quite a considerable sum of money about him, what he had saved in view of his possible marriage to Carrie. But it is creditable to Sammy's heart that he did not think of himself or his future now, but only of what he could do to save Queenie, and he was ready to spend every cent, if necessary, in that effort.

It was one of the rules of Helliwell Mansion that no one should be admitted without an introduction, but Sammy managed to effect an entrance by means of a liberal tip to the flunky at the door, who was moreover considerably impressed by his aristocratic appearance.

Once inside, it was easy to go into one of the supper rooms and order a bottle of champagne. Then, as has been told before, he listened and certainly overheard what was of much value.

As soon as he entered the reception room, he called softly: "Queenie!" and then as loudly as he dared: "Queenie! Queenie!"

The second time Queenie heard him, and recognized his voice with a rush of thankfulness that her prayer had been answered and a friend had been sent to her. She came closer to the door, and called:

"Dear old Sammy, help me!"

Sammy ran toward the room whence her voice proceeded, and putting his mouth close to the jam, replied:

"Of course I'll help you. I've only got a second. They'll be back directly."

"What am I to do?" asked Queenie, breathlessly.

"He'll let you out. When he comes near you pretend to faint, and leave the rest to me. Hush! Somebody's coming."

Sammy started from the door and glanced quickly around to see where he could hide. There was a large sofa in the room, and this seemed to offer the best shelter. In the twinkling of an eye he was safely ensconsced behind it, lying flat upon his face.

He was not a moment too soon; for, scarcely was he hidden than Rodney Haynes entered the room, carrying in his hand a small bottle and a handkerchief.

There was a look of anticipated triumph on his handsome though vicious face, for he was thinking to himself that if the girl he coveted (or rather whose fortune he coveted) should still continue obdurate, the articles he bore would do the trick.

He unlocked the door of the room where Queenie was, and said:

"You can come out."

Queenie slowly emerged.

Clever though she was in her own particular line as a public performer, she was not a very good actress, and she could not conceal, even in that critical moment, the scorn she felt for the scoundrel before her.

"I am going to give you one more chance," began Rodney. "Consent to become my wife and you are free."

In his power though she was, she upreared her shapely head and answered haughtily:

"As I told you when safe in my own home, I tell you now: I will die first!"

Rodney Haynes was not always able to control his temper, and this was one of the times he failed. With an exclamation of rage, he caught her roughly by the wrist.

Then Queenie remembered the injunction that had been given her.

"Don't, Rodney, don't! You frighten me!" she murmured, staggering as if about to fall.

Haynes threw his arm about her waist, a touch which was hideous to her, but which, under the circumstances, she was forced to submit to. She attempted to render herself as limp and lifeless as possible. The simulation at all events deceived the man it was intended to deceive, and her cousin, believing that she had fainted, laid her down upon the sofa.

This turn in affairs was not altogether distasteful to Rodney Haynes, for it gave him the opportunity he desired. Now was his time, he thought. A few

drops on the handkerchief, and she would be quiet until morning.

He raised the square of linen, and poured upon it a portion of the contents of the bottle.

Then he bent over Queenie.

But, as he did so, Sammy rose suddenly from behind the couch and dashed both bottle and handkerchief from his hand.

Taken though he was by surprise, Haynes grappled at once with his unknown assailant. The captain was a powerful man and he would probably have made short work of his antagonist, had it not been for Queenie's presence of mind.

Although disguised, she knew it must be Sammy. She bounded from the couch, and, snatching up the handkerchief, she darted behind Haynes, and pressed it closely over his nose and mouth. It was in vain for him to struggle; the fumes of the drug gradually overpowered him, and Sammy managed to pinion his arms so that he could not tear away the handkerchief.

In a very few moments, Rodney Haynes, hoist with his own petard, fell heavily to the ground, powerless, inert, unconscious.

"Oh, Sammy," exclaimed Queenie, frightened at the results of her own action, "will it kill him?"

"Not it!" laughed Sammy, delightedly. "It isn't rat poison."

As he spoke he stooped, and picked up a pocket book which in the struggle had fallen from one of Haynes' pockets.

"I'll collar this," he thought to himself. "It may prove useful."

In accordance with this idea, he stowed it carefully away, and then said to Queenie, who was still gazing, half alarmed, at Haynes' pale, quiet face:

"Now, then, give us a hand, Queenie."

Between them, they managed to drag the unconscious form behind the sofa.

Then Sammy went to the hall door, but only to turn back quickly.

"Here's Hilda Corrode coming!" he said, rapidly. "Back to that room there, and don't come out until somebody calls you."

Queenie obeyed, and Sammy himself returned to his neglected bottle of champagne, being careful, however, to leave the door ajar so that he could hear all that might go on.

When Hilda entered the room, she detected at once the strong odor of the drug, and naturally concluded that her partner in crime had been successful in the plan of which she had been the prime mover.

But where was he? Where was the unconscious form of their victim?

She was about to make a search, when she paused in consternation. A voice she knew well rose in loud and angry command from the hall.

"Stand back, I say! By the Heaven that made me I'll lay low the first man that bars my way.

In another moment, David Engleheart appeared before her, while two or three frightened flunkies peered round the corners of the hall door.

"Hilda Corrode, where is my promised wife?"

"She is not here," answered Hilda, boldly, although she felt herself quivering from head to foot.

But David Engleheart was in no mood to be trifled with.

"Don't stand there and perjure yourself!" he cried, sternly. "I have traced her here, and if you have harmed one hair of her head, let all beneath this roof tremble!"

Strange to say, in spite of his words, the very sound of this man's voice served only to bring all Hilda's love for him to the front. She forgot all else, and in the strength of her passion, which blinded her to realities, fatuously hoped that even now she might win him to her side.

"Have I not the right to hate her?" she said, softly and pleadingly. "Has she not taken your heart from me? Oh, David, look at me! Am I not as fair as she? Can you not give me one word of love?"

But, with a look of loathing upon his face, David Engleheart drew back, as if a venomous reptile was about to approach him.

"Stand back!" he commanded. "The very touch of such a woman as you is an insult to an honest man!"

This was unmistakable. And even the infatuated woman, blinded though she was, could not fail to understand it.

"Beware!" she cried, wildly. "A woman scorned can turn and rend!"

David's lip curled in contempt and derision.

"I fear neither you nor any here. Again I demand the girl you are hiding from me."

Hilda Corrode was bought to bay. But under the circumstances, she was not entirely sorry for it. If Rodney Haynes had only arranged his part in the little comedy they were about to play, she would wring the heart of this man who had flung aside her proffered love even as he had wrung hers.

"Well, then," she acknowledged, with a toss of her head, "she is here."

A cry broke from David's lips, a cry in which joy and anguish were mingled.

"But she is worthless," continued Hilda, "and remains here of her own free will."

It required all of David's self-control to prevent him from forgetting her sex and from chastising as she deserved the person who gave utterance to these lying words.

"It is false!" he cried furiously. "She is detained here by force, and I will call on all the sleeping city to aid my search if you do not instantly restore her to me!"

Meanwhile, the noise of the altercation had reached the ears of the revelers and gamblers, and from two or three of the rooms they came pouring into the reception room, a motley crowd of men and women more or less intoxicated.

Sammy Blythe, thinking it time to put in an appearance, also emerged from his hiding-place.

David turned impetuously toward the confused rows of surprised faces.

"Even beneath this roof," he exclaimed, in ringing tones, which pierced to the brain of even the most besotted of them all, "there must still be a little honesty left. Hear me, all of you! A decent and innocent girl has been heartlessly decoyed to this place to-night. In the name of the mothers and sisters who once must have loved you, I ask you to tell me where she is."

He ceased, but there was no response, for no one among them knew aught of this girl he spoke of. His words, however, had had their effect. Several of the men looked, as they felt, ashamed of themselves, and more than one of the women was in tears.

Then Sammy Blythe called aloud, at the top of his voice:

"Queenie! Queenie!"

And Queenie, like a dove trooping among crows, came forth.

"David," she said, going to him, "I am here!"

With a rapturous cry, David caught her to his breast.

Furious at being thus foiled, Hilda screamed.

"Seize her! Stop them!"

"Let him lay a finger on me who dares!" cried David, threateningly.

And no one of them dared, or, rather perhaps to do them justice, not one of them cared to.

Unmolested by all, David bore his recovered sweetheart from the room.

Sammy Blythe followed swaggeringly behind.

In a few moments, the fetid, unhealthy atmosphere of Helliwell Mansion was left behind, and the sweet, fresh air of the night was blowing upon their faces.

The dove had escaped the snares of the fowler.

CHAPTER XV.

A MORNING OF SUNSHINE.

Three days have passed since Queenie's rescue from the horrors of Helliwell Mansion, and in the peace and happiness by which she is now surrounded, it seems difficult for her to believe that the events of that night were anything more than a ghastly dream.

The next morning, accompanied by Mrs. Jones and Carrie, whose joy at the recovery of the girl they so dearly loved was boundless, Queenie left the Burlington, and with all precautions that her destination should not be discovered, went to take up her residence in a furnished house which Mr. Fuller had procured for her.

This was a villa in St. John's Wood and a remarkably pretty place, too.

The house itself was comfortable and commodious, though only two stories high, and had quite an extensive garden stretching at one side of it, the whole surrounded by a high, brick wall.

The morning on which we first make acquaintance with it was a beautiful one, bright and sunshiny, and quite warm enough to admit of one's sitting out of doors.

Certainly Mrs. Jones, who was dozing over her

knitting in a big armchair on the porch, found it delightful.

A dispatch from Signor Jonesio that very morning had stated that he had reconsidered his idea of giving a supplemental season and had decided to close the show until the following spring. This was good news to them all, for David and Sammy were not obliged to leave their sweethearts, and it gave Queenie an opportunity to insist that her foster mother and sister should remain with her during the winter. Mrs. Jones, who was an independent lady, was at first inclined to demur to this, but, when it was pointed out to her that Queenie could not live alone, and that she was conferring a favor rather than accepting one, she consented.

"Where's Queenie, mother?"

Mrs. Jones started into full wakefulness to see Carrie standing in the doorway.

"Walking in the garden with David. Ah!" with a sigh of satisfaction, "seeing them together, one can quite believe in the old saying: Marriages are made in Heaven."

"Ah, she's lucky, she is," said Carrie, a bit enviously.

Mrs. Jones looked up in surprise and reproach. Ever since Sammy had so distinguished himself in aiding to save Queenie the motherly old lady had lowered her colors, taken him without reserve to her heart, and was now one of his staunchest champions.

"Well!" she said, emphatically. "And ain't you?

Sammy isn't a beauty certainly, but he's a good, honest little chap and as brave as a lion."

"Oh, I know that he behaved like a hero the other night, but—but——"

"Well, but what?"

Carrie sniffed suspiciously.

"I'd like to ask him a question or two when I get a chance."

Just then the door in the garden wall opened, and the young man they were speaking of came briskly up the path.

"Well, now you'll have it," said Mrs. Jones, as she recognized him.

"Good-morning, Mrs. J." called out Sammy blithely. "Carrie, embrace your honeyboy."

"Not I," replied that perverse young lady, curtly turning her back.

"Oh! Sorry I don't suit!" returned Sammy, calmly. He was beginning to become accustomed to her various moods, and they did not trouble him as they once did.

"I see you two are going to have a tiff," said Mrs. Jones rising heavily. "Fight it out, dears, and I'll go to Queenie in the garden."

She waddled calmly away, leaving the two young people to their own devices. But it did not prove much of a tiff after all. The fact was, Carrie was jealous, and she insisted upon a full and true account of his doings at Helliwell Mansion on that eventful night. But when Sammy had solemnly sworn that he had not spoken to a single member of the female

persuasion except Queenie, she was finally satisfied and took him back into her good graces.

"And now, Carrie," said Sammy, after peace had been made, "I'm going to tell you a secret."

"A secret!" womanlike all attention. "Oh, how delightful!"

"Yes, it's about a pocketbook."

"What pocketbook?"

"A pocketbook the captain dropped in our struggle the other night."

"Oh, Sammy! Let me look! Do let me look!"

"Of course," said Sammy, tantalizingly. "Woman's curiosity as usual. Remember the fate of Bluebeard's wife and beware!"

But the fate of Bluebeard's wife, or any other female, had no terrors for Carrie. There was a secret, and she was determined to know it.

"Sammy!" she almost shrieked. "If you don't make haste I shall go off with a bang."

But for once in his life Sammy had the advantage. He knew it and was resolved to make the most of it.

"One moment!" he said, coolly. "You really love me."

"Yes, yes," she assented, but with very little affection in her tone.

"And you promise faithfully to marry me?"

"Yes, yes, anything! But do let me look at the pocketbook."

"Well," with the most provoking slowness, "I haven't got it with me."

Carrie turned scarlet with disappointment and

anger. It would have done her heart good to box his ears.

"Oh!" she burst out. "You deceitful, hateful, abandoned, ugly, little wretch!"

"Sorry I don't suit," returned Sammy, with a grin.

And then, thinking he had gone as far as it was wise to go, he relented. "Never mind, Carrie, I was only joking. Here it is."

And with that he produced the pocketbook.

All excitement, Carrie dragged him down beside her upon the step of the porch, and together they proceeded to open the pocketbook and examine its contents. They had no thought whatever as to whether they had a right to meddle with another person's property, and, if they had had, considering who that other person was, it would not have mattered to them in the least.

The contents on the whole proved absorbingly interesting. There were betting papers, I. O. U.'s, unpaid bills and a letter from one of the most notorious counterfeiters in London.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Sammy, as they came across this last, "the captain will swear when he finds he has lost this. On the very face of this letter, he'd get ten years."

Then followed the most exciting find of all. A letter from Hilda Corrode pleading for the return of her child, and several receipts for money paid out for the keep of this child, with an address at the head of the receipts.

Sammy and Carrie looked at each other.

"Then there is a guiltier tie between those two than any of us thought," said Carrie, very seriously.

"He ought to be wiped out!" returned Sammy, viciously. "Here, Carrie," handing her the pocket-book, "put them away. They'll come useful yet."

Carrie accepted the trust, and carefully stowed away the documents with their receptacle in the bosom of her dress.

As she finished doing so, a dignified voice saluted them.

"Good-morning, young people. Is Miss Carruthers in?"

"Good-morning, Mr. Fuller," replied Carrie, rising. "Yes, Queenie's in the garden. I'll call her."

And she suited the action to the word.

"Young man," said the lawyer, tapping Sammy familiarly on the shoulder, "do you know anything about the law?"

Sammy looked up at him in surprise.

"Why, sir, I was once fined five bob for being a teetotaler," he replied, facetiously.

Mr. Fuller laughed.

"Because by the clever way you went to work the other night, you're too artful for a circus performer. You ought to have been a lawyer."

Sammy thought he saw a chance and was about to ask Mr. Fuller if he would not give him an opportunity. But unfortunately for his aspirations, Carrie reappeared, followed by her mother, David and Queenie.

The latter came forward with both hands held out.

"Dear Mr. Fuller!"' she exclaimed, cordially. "How glad I am to see you!"

"And, I you, my dear," returned the lawyer, kissing her in a fatherly fashion upon the forehead. "To see you safe and unharmed from the deadly peril with which you were threatened." This was Mr. Fuller's first visit to the villa. "Your hand, sir," turning to David. "You played a noble part that night."

David's manly face became suffused with blushes.

"I played but a man's part, sir," he said, modestly, "in protecting the woman I love."

Mr. Fuller nodded his gray head once or twice in a reflective sort of way, and then he said, abruptly:

"I believe I have been in the wrong about you in not thinking you worthy of her. At any rate, Mr. Engleheart, call at my office to-morrow morning and we'll have a long chat. Maybe a certain self-willed, obstinate young woman," with a smiling glance at Queenie, "will not have to wait for the man of her choice so long as she thought."

"My dear guardian!" exclaimed Queenie, her face like a rose.

"Tut! tut!" said Mr. Fuller, although he was smiling all the time. "No more sentiment! I'm here on business."

Then, motioning the rest to be seated and taking a chair himself, he continued with considerable gravity:

"My dear child, you may not know that not the least part of the fortune bequeathed you consists of a remarkably large and unique collection of jewels.

As you are now about to make your debut into society, it is only right that they should be in your possession. I have therefore instructed the authorities at the bank where they have been deposited to deliver them to you here some time to-day."

"Say, Queenie," ventured the irrepressible Sammy, "do you want a light porter?"

Mr. Fuller frowned at him. It was altogether too serious a matter with him to admit of jesting.

"There's no fear of that," he said, severely. "They are too valuable to be entrusted to any but the officials of the bank."

"Why, what are they, Mr. Fuller?" asked Queenie, with mild curiosity.

"They consist of the finest rubies, emeralds and pearls, and, with the famous Carruthers diamonds, are valued at thirty thousand pounds."

The mention of this large sum was too much for Mrs. Jones. She sank back in her chair with an awed exclamation of:

"Great heavens!"

Her emotion was shared in a lesser degree by Sammy and Carrie.

David alone looked grave, almost sad.

"Oh, David," exclaimed Queenie, "fancy poor little me weighed down by all this splendor!"

"They will not be noticed, dear," returned David, quietly. "Your eyes will outshine them all."

"And now," said Mr. Fuller, rising, "I must leave you for a while, but I will return later in the day to see that the jewel case has been safely delivered."

As the lawyer's footsteps sounded down the path, Mrs. Jones began to recover from the commotion into which she had been thrown.

"Oh, my dear child," she said, with an unctuous sigh, "it reminds me of the time when I rode bare-backed before the Prince of Wales."

Sammy leaned toward her.

"Say, Mrs. Jones," he whispered, "did you really do that?"

"Yes, I did," she answered, proudly, "and I have the programme to prove it."

"What, bare-backed," in a tone of admiration.

"Yes, Mr. Imperence, bare-backed."

"Then you must have been bare-faced to do it."

And Sammy, amused at his own wit, and yet a little afraid of the consequences, ran away into the garden, followed by Carrie.

Mrs. Jones, scarlet with indignation, rose to her feet and started heavily after them, calling out angrily:

"And you think you're going to marry my daughter! You, Carrie, leave that young monkey, leave him I say!"

Her voice died away. David and Queenie were left alone. The sunshine lay warm about them, and the only sound was the humming of the bees amidst the late flowers.

"How silent you are, David mine," said Queenie, slipping one little white hand into his.

David sighed deeply.

"It is my pride, Queenie, battling with my love. My manhood would bid me go right away and try to

forget you, but my love holds me a prisoner to your side."

"Love must conquer always, David," replied Queenie, with a confident smile. "Stifle this false pride and hand in hand we will try to make our little part of the world brighter and happier. You shall help me to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, comfort the sick and afflicted, so that at the end of life's fitful journey we may show ourselves worthy of the trust God has placed in us."

"But the world will call me a fortune hunter."

At the same, however, his arm stole about her slender waist, and Queenie's golden head sank contentedly upon his shoulder.

"Our world shall be in our own hearts," she murmured, softly, "and love shall be the only ruler!"

CHAPTER XVI.

"GO AND SIN NO MORE."

"Inform your mistress that a lady wishes to see her. Never mind the name."

The trim maid bowed and retired.

The time was the afternoon of the same day, the scene Queenie's pretty drawing room, and the speaker Hilda Corrode.

Hilda had come on a desperate mission and no one knew it better than herself. But still the reward was great. Her object was the recovery of the pocket-book, and Haynes had promised her if she succeeded that her child should be restored to her. The one pure, unselfish affection of Hilda's life was her love for her little girl, and she would have risked much more than this to regain possession of her.

Helliwell Mansion was no longer open to the public. Haynes, after what had happened, concluded that it would be no longer safe to continue business there, and the house was apparently deserted. But the captain was still in hiding there, knowing full well that if he should be sought for by the police, there was a sure means of escape.

It enraged Hilda when she thought what Haynes with all his cleverly-laid schemes, had brought her to. He had given the game away, sold them both by means of a miserable pocketbook into the hands

of their enemies. At first she despaired of recovering that damaging piece of evidence. For there was no trace of where Queenie and her friends had gone. By a mere stroke of luck, however, she had caught sight of Mr. Fuller in the street, jumped into a hansom, and tracked him to the villa in St. John's Wood.

And now she was here to see what she could do. Even if she did not succeed, it was something to know Queenie's abode.

She longed to pay the girl back, as she expressed it to herself, to see her humbled to the dust.

But that was not the thing to be thought of now. Her role at present was to be humble and submissive. If she played her cards well, she felt sure she would win in the end.

Queenie entered the room with a slight look of wonder in her blue eyes. She could not imagine who this lady to see her might be.

"I beg your pardon, madam," she began. And then, recognizing her visitor, she stopped short and drew herself up proudly. "You here!"

"Yes, Queenie," said Hilda, endeavoring to appear friendly and remorseful. At the same time she held out her hand.

But Queenie, with the same gesture that Hilda had used at Helliwell Mansion, put hers behind her back.

"Don't bear malice, Queenie," said Hilda, with an admirable assumption of gentle pleading, although her breast was filled with rage.

"Miss Carruthers," corrected Queenie, with dignity.

"I beg your pardon," said Hilda, humbly. "I ought to have remembered that I have lost all right to use the old familiar name."

"Why are you here?" demanded Queenie, shortly.

"I have come in all humility to plead to you, to beg——"

"One moment," interrupted Queenie.

Then, going to the door she called:

"Carrie!"

"Yes, dear," replied Carrie's voice outside.

"Come here a moment."

"What is it, Queenie?" asked Carrie as she entered the room.

Then her eyes rested upon Hilda, and she started forward, her pretty face convulsed with anger.

"What are you doing here?" she asked, fiercely.

"I wish to see Miss Carruthers alone," replied Hilda, coldly, although her eyes returned fully the hatred which flashed from Carrie's. There was no need for her to play the hypocrite with that girl, at all events.

"And I refuse to be left alone with you for a single moment," replied Queenie, with decision. "Once bit, twice shy, Hilda Corrode!"

"Quite right, dear," exclaimed Carrie, approvingly, "and if she tries the drugged handkerchief dodge on you again," with a meaning look at Hilda, "you shout fire and I'll scream murder!" Queenie quietly motioned her to say no more, and then looking Hilda full in the eyes she said, icily:

"Explain your errand in as few words as possible, please."

Hilda had conned her part beforehand, and she repeated in a rather parrot-like way:

"Haynes has wronged me greatly in the past, but profiting by the lesson taught him the other night, he sees that all hope of securing you and your fortune has gone, so in the end turns to me and in another land has promised to retrieve his good name and make me his wife."

"Make you his wife!" repeated Carrie, with a short, scornful laugh. "Well, he must be hard up."

The color rose in Hilda's face, but, paying no attention to this unflattering remark, she continued, still addressing Queenie:

"But there are conditions."

"Now we come to it!" burst out Carrie, who, in spite of Queenie's warning glance, simply could not refrain from expressing her opinions and criticisms.

"When Haynes was drugged," proceeded Hilda, still systematically ignoring Carrie, "a pocketbook was either taken from or slipped out of his pocket."

Queenie knew this, for Carrie at the first opportunity had imparted to her all the particulars of Sammy's find.

"Yes, that is so," she agreed.

"The pocketook and its contents are not of the slightest value, but——"

This statement, with the knowledge she possessed, was too much for fiery Carrie, and she exploded.

"That isn't so, Hilda Corrode. There's enough in

that precious document to get your beautiful husband-elect ten years hard."

Then at last Hilda deigned to notice her.

"How do you know that?" she asked, sharply.

Carrie smiled derisively.

"Because I've examined all the tasty little documents contained therein, and at the present moment it is reposing in a safe place."

Hilda had turned pale beneath her rouge.

"But you will give it back to me?" she said, with a tremble in her voice which was genuine.

"No," answered Queenie, resolutely. "I shall keep it as a guarantee for my safety. If Rodney Haynes attempts to molest me again, the contents of that pocketbook will be placed immediately in the hands of the police."

Hilda was silent. She saw the hope she had cherished fading mistily away. But still she would make one more plea.

"I had hoped," she said at last, slowly and impressively, "that you would have spared me this last humiliating confession of my weakness and sin. There—there is a child, my little Leila, the only being on earth who loves me, the only one who believes me pure and worthy as other women who are mothers."

The woman was not acting now. The great mother love, and there is no other love on earth like it, had welled up in her heart, making her sincere and true. No one who heard her then could have failed to believe her.

It is little wonder, therefore, that Queenie's tender and sympathetic heart was touched.

"Oh, Carrie!" she breathed, pitifully.

"Hush!" murmured Carrie, all her vindictiveness vanished, for, as we know, she was a good little creature at heart. "Listen a moment."

The tears and rare enough they had been for some time past, were starting in Hilda's eyes, and her whole frame was trembling with emotion, good, true, honest emotion, emotion that few men or women could have helped respecting and sympathizing with.

When she spoke again it was with manifest difficulty.

"For some time past he has been cruel enough to conceal from me where the child is hidden; but has now sworn an oath that if I regain the pocketbook my Leila shall be restored to me. I do not plead for myself alone now, but for my little one. She may be with people who neglect, illtreat her; she may be calling on her mother in helpless grief, and I am powerless to aid her. I——"

But she could continue no further. The picture conjured up by her own words had overpowered her. She broke down and covered her face with her hands.

There were tears, too, in both of her auditors' eyes.

Carrie was quite vanquished.

"Queenie," she whispered. "The address where the child is kept is in that pocketbook. It is only a street or two away. Shall we——"

"Hush!" interrupted Queenie, whose mind was already made up.

Then she turned slowly to the unhappy mother.

"Stay here, Hilda," she said, far more gently than she had spoken hitherto. "We will return in a few minutes."

Hilda's hands fell. There was a wild eagerness in her eyes as she cried:

"Ah, you have repented! You will give it back?"

"No," answered Queenie, firmly. "The pocket-book I shall keep. As for yourself, I say again, wait, and perhaps more mercy may be shown to you than you have shown to others."

She took Carrie's hand, and together the two girls left the room.

As she followed them with her eyes, all tenderness, all softness vanished from Hilda Corrode's face, to be replaced by a wolfish ferocity. She did not understand. How could she have done so? She believed that this girl who had stood between her and the man she loved was now to part her from her child. Well, she thought savagely, every dog has his day, and hers would come yet. Queenie Carruthers might be in her power again, and the next time she would stake her soul that she should not escape so easily.

These cruel resolves were interrupted by a knock at the door.

"Come in," she called, composing her face.

A man appeared in a dark-blue uniform. Beneath his arm, he carried a leather case. He had a pleas-

ant, honest face, but not one that was instinct with a large amount of intelligence.

He removed his cap, and said respectfully:

"I have brought your jewels from the bank, Miss Carruthers."

"Jewels," repeated Hilda, mechanically.

"I'm not sorry to finish my errand," continued the messenger, with a nervous little laugh. "One feels rather uneasy with thirty thousand pounds about him."

"Thirty thousand pounds!" Hilda breathed rather than spoke the words.

The messenger looked at her admiringly. He thought she was one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen in his life. He was rather a susceptible youth.

"You are Miss Carruthers, I presume?" he asked, although he had every reason to believe that she was, as the servant had told him Miss Carruthers was in the drawing room.

Hilda hesitated for an almost imperceptible instant, and then she answered, calmly:

"Yes."

"Then you will sign this receipt, please," said the messenger, producing a book.

Hilda took the book, walked slowly over to a writing table which stood in a corner of the room, and signed, of course not her own name.

Then she returned the book to the messenger, who glanced at the signature.

"Queenie Carruthers," he said. "Thank you. Quite correct."

He placed the leather case upon the table.

"Good-afternoon, miss."

"Good-afternoon."

The messenger left the room, with a backward glance of admiration.

Hilda stood as if rooted to the floor. What was this mad project that was surging in her brain? What was she about to do? Was she, Hilda Corrode, to become a common thief? Oh, not that! Surely not that! And yet, why not? She had no mercy to hope from any one there. Fortune had played into her hands. With those jewels, she could fly to some distant country, some strange land far beyond Rodney Haynes' power, and secretly set men to watch and trace the whereabouts of her child. What did it all mean? Rest! Wealth! Happiness! All was within her reach. Yes, she would take advantage of it.

She seized the leathern case with its precious contents and concealed it beneath her cloak.

Now for flight! But not through the main entrance. The servants might be about, and suspect. There was a French window opening out into the garden. Yes, that way!

She started toward it.

But before she could reach it a shadow was flung across the sunlight, and almost immediately the figure of a man appeared in the opening.

Hilda recognized him both by sight and by instinct. It was David Engleheart.

David was not surprised to see her, for he had been told by Queenie that she was there. But,

fearful of any danger that might threaten his darling, he had determined to watch this woman whom he knew to be her enemy.

"Why are you hastening away like this?" he asked, quietly.

"Let me pass, please," replied Hilda, feverishly. "My errand here is finished."

"Not so! I have just seen Queenie. She pities you, she pardons you."

The situation was becoming intolerable to Hilda Corrode. She felt that she could not endure one more word from the lips of this man. She must get away from this place, get away with what she imagined was to purchase her peace. She did not look forward to happiness.

"I want neither her pardon nor her pity," she declared. "Will you let me pass?"

"I cannot permit it yet," replied David in a kindly manner. He knew the whole story, and as he believed was detaining her only for her own good. "Be patient, and you will find that a pleasant surprise is in store for you."

But Hilda saw only a threat in these words, which were intended to encourage her.

"Let me go!" she cried, in terror. "Do you hear? Let me go!"

She turned from David and darted toward the door, only to confront Queenie, Mrs. Jones and Sammy.

"What's the row?"

"Whatever is the matter?"

The first question from Sammy and the latter from Mrs. Jones.

Hilda was now close to the end of her tether. She could not endure much more.

"Tell this man to let me go!" she cried, frantically still clutching the case of jewels beneath her cloak. "I will not stay! I have done with you all!"

Queenie was about to reveal to her the reason why she should remain for a time longer when she was prevented by the precipitate entrance of Mr. Fuller, followed by a very scared young man in a blue uniform.

Mr. Fuller himself was decidedly flustered.

"Queenie," he exclaimed, excitedly, "have you received your jewels safely?"

Hilda, with a shuddering motion, drew back.

"My jewels!" repeated Queenie in surprise. "No, Mr. Fuller, I have seen nothing of them."

"I thought not," said the lawyer, emphatically. "By luck I met this messenger who told me he had delivered the case into your own hands and showed me the receipt. But a chance word almost convinced me that it wasn't you, so I brought him on at once."

"A receipt," said Queenie. "Let me look at it."

She took the book from the trembling hands of the messenger, who, to his horror, now saw that he had made a mistake.

"This is not my signature!"

Hilda, in the excitement, was attempting to steal toward the door, but the messenger caught sight of

her, and jumped in front of her, barring her progress.

"No wonder, miss," he cried, pointing his hand at the cowering form of Hilda, "as that's the lady that wrote it."

At this direct denunciation, Hilda attempted to assert herself.

"It's a lie," she said, hoarsely. "I know nothing of your jewels, and I insist upon leaving this place at once."

But Sammy, who was certainly a born detective, had noticed the protuberance beneath her cloak. He gave her arm a sharp knock and the case fell to the floor.

"That's it!" cried the messenger, picking it up, with boundless relief. He then and there registered a vow that never again would he fall a victim to female beauty.

After this proof positive, there was intense silence in the room. All eyes were fixed upon Hilda, who stood motionless, her hands pressed to her panting breast.

David was the first to speak.

"A thief! Sammy, fetch the police!"

Sammy departed with alacrity. He had no love for Hilda Corrode.

"What would you do?" asked the guilty woman, raising her eyes and speaking in a strained, unnatural voice.

"Send you where you will have to answer for your crimes," answered David, gravely.

Hilda drew a quick, rasping breath.

"Have me arrested? You will not dare!"

"It is my duty," was the resolute response.

No other word was spoken until Sammy returned with the policeman.

Then David turned to the man of the law.

"I give this woman into custody for stealing a case of valuable jewels," he said, pointing to Hilda. "All here can bear witness to the charge."

In spite of all, if ever any one was to be pitied it was Hilda Corrode at that moment. To be condemned, to be delivered over to justice, by the man who had been to her beyond all others. That moment was surely bitter enough to atone for much in her past.

She shivered and swayed as if about to faint, as the officer approached.

But before his hand could touch her a clear, fresh voice cried out, electrifying all those present:

"See, Hilda, your child!"

It was Carrie, who had entered through the window, and who naturally had no notion whatever of what had recently occurred.

With her was a pretty little girl of some six or seven years.

With a wild shriek, Hilda thrust the officer aside, and rushing to the child, flung herself on her knees beside her, and clasped her to her breast in a passion of sobs and tears.

"Leila, my darling! My own darling!"

The little girl threw her arms about her mother's neck and pressed her soft cheek close to the painted one. Guilt and innocence in each other's arms!

With the exception of the officer, who was not in the secret, there was not a dry eye in the room.

But the law must be enforced, and after a slight pause, its representative came fowrard and laid his hand upon Hilda's shoulder.

She turned and looked up wildly in his face.

"Mamma," whimpered the little girl, "I'm frightened. What does the policeman want?"

Upon her knees her child still clasped close to her heart, Hilda turned her haggard eyes toward David Engleheart, the arbiter of her fate.

"Ah, no! no! You will not do this thing! Do not degrade me in the eyes of my own child! In God's name pity me."

"Have mercy, David!" sobbed Queenie, clinging to him.

Her appeal, however, was scarcely necessary, for David, touched to the heart's core, had already made up his mind what to do.

"Officer, I withdraw my charge."

The officer's hand fell from Hilda's shoulder.

"Hilda Corrode," went on David, solemnly, and yet with infinite pity in his tones, "yes, for your child's sake, I will spare you. Go, and sin no more!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ESCAPE ROOM.

There were many peculiarities about Helliwell Mansion, some of which the police were cognizant of, and some of which they were not. Amongst the latter was an apartment on the ground floor which was known to the initiated as the "Escape Room."

In the centre of this apartment, concealed by a large rug was a trap-door, beneath which flowed the dark silent waters of the Thames. There was a rope ladder, and near by was always concealed a boat. This was intended as the last desperate way of escape for the "gang," should the house ever be surrounded.

In this room sat Rodney Haynes. He considered it as good a place as any other for him to remain in for a few days at least. It was in the evening, and he was alone in the house, save for one or two servants that had been retained to minister to his wants.

He had been reading a newspaper, and there was one item that had interested him greatly. This paragraph ran as follows:

"Important engagement of David Engleheart, the Star of the Air. This celebrated gymnast will make his first appearance in London at the Indian Exhibition on Saturday next."

So, Haynes thought, this muscular rival of his had obtained an opening in London, had he?

That was worth knowing. It would be a clew to Queenie's whereabouts, at any rate. She had beaten him for the present, but the game was not lost yet.

A knock at the door startled him. But in another instant he was relieved by the appearance of Mark Blackwood.

"Are you alone, captain?" asked the latter, peering about the room, which was but dimly lighted.

"Yes, come in," was the quick, rather irritable response. "Now, what's your news?"

Mark entered, closing the door behind him.

"Bad," he answered briefly.

"Well, out with it."

"I've got kicked out from the Burlington."

An expression of relief passed over Haynes' face. He had feared that it was something more personal to himself. Blackwood's misfortunes were of no consequence to him, so long as they did not affect himself.

"What for? Theft?" he asked, bluntly and concisely.

"Yes."

"Robbing the till, I suppose."

"No," said Mark, looking him full in the face, "robbing the queen's mail, stealing letters for you."

"Oh, you were caught, eh?" said Haynes, indifferently. "Well, what do you come to me for?"

There was an ugly look in Blackwood's narrow eyes as he came a step or two nearer and replied:

"I've done all your dirty work, but I'm sick of it now. To the world at large, who don't know you as

I do, you are a gentleman still. Your word will go a long way in getting me a berth. Do this, or——"

He paused, but there was no question as to the significance of the uncompleted sentence. It was a threat pure and simple.

Still, Haynes did not seem to be greatly disturbed.

"Well, or what?" he asked, coolly.

"I go straight to the police, and blow all I know."

"Why, you scoundrel," returned Haynes, with a sneering laugh, "I can get you a lifer for burglary and manslaughter."

Although he was well aware that this was true, Blackwood's blood was up. He was a desperate man, and was determined to push matters to extremities. His answer was rapid and shrill.

"And I can get you drummed out of one branch of her majesty's service only to enter a far less pleasant one on a charge of robbery, counterfeit coining, conspiracy, abduction, keeping a gaming house——"

With a dark scowl upon his face, Haynes held up his hand for silence.

Blackwood obeyed and stopped short. He was pretty certain now that he had not miscalculated his strength, and that he was going to win.

"I will obtain you a berth on one condition," said Haynes, after a pause.

"Is it to thieve again for you? I've had some——"

"Simply that you obey me implicitly until the end of this week," interrupted Haynes, "and I will give you a sufficient sum of money to make a fresh start. Then we will meet no more."

This suited Blackwood. It was as much as he had

hoped to obtain, and, although he knew it meant further villainy, he was in no position to decline.

"You promise that?" he asked, scanning the other narrowly.

"I promise."

Even if he did not keep his word, things would be in no worse condition than they were at present.

Besides, Mark did not believe that the captain would dare to fail him, considering the information he possessed. So he consented.

"Now, what do you want me to do?"

"At present my plans are not clearly formed. To-morrow, however, go to the Indian Exhibition. They want a quantity of men as attendants there. You will have no difficulty in obtaining a position. I will let you know later in the week what more I require of you."

The sound of voices outside the door just then reached Haynes' ears, which had been especially on the alert of late.

He caught Blackwood by the arm and drew him away into a shadowy corner.

But the owners of the voices were not people he had any cause to fear, as he saw in another moment, when Hilda Corrode, holding her little girl by the hand, entered the room.

A low exclamation broke from Haynes' lips as he saw the child. How had Hilda managed to obtain possession of her?

"Mamma, dear," asked little Leila, "are we at home now?"

"Not yet, darling," replied Hilda, tenderly.

"Mamma will just pack some clothes, and then we will both go to a nice home."

Then Rodney Haynes stepped forward.

"What's the meaning of this?" he asked, in a cold, clear voice.

Hilda involuntarily started back, and, with a quick motion, thrust Leila behind her.

Then she answered him, with head erect and fearless intonation. She despised the man too much to fear him.

"It means," she said, calmly, "that my child has been restored to me."

"By whom?"

"Queenie Carruthers."

Rodney Haynes' whole frame became convulsed with passion.

"You have told her this, have you?" he cried, violently, half raising his hand.

In alarm, little Leila ran forward.

"Oh, don't, papa!" she cried, imploringly, in her sweet, childish treble. "Don't be cross with me and mamma. We're both so tired, and mamma is so white and ill. Poor mamma!"

Haynes looked at her with an expression of disgust. All paternal affection had certainly been left out of his composition.

"I wish you and your wretched mother were drowning," he said, brutally. "Get out of this!"

In affright, the poor child ran back to her mother, who stooped and put her arms soothingly about her.

"Well, what are you going to do?" asked Haynes, addressing Hilda.

She raised her sad eyes and looked at him. Hilda Corrode was a changed woman. She had never been thoroughly bad at heart. Circumstances had made her what she was, and she had been more sinned against than sinning. That scene at Queenie's villa where she had witnessed the divine forgiveness of a good woman, and where the man she loved had bade her to go and sin no more, had brought to the surface all that was good in her. More than this, the innocent kisses of her little child had roused in her breast a determination that her future life should be worthy of her better self and of this pure little being that loved her and called her mother.

"I want to pack a few necessary clothes," she said, quietly, "and I will go and trouble you no more."

Haynes shrugged his shoulders scornfully.

"Indeed! And how are you going to live?"

"Honestly, or starve."

There was no bravado, no false heroics in this response; it was simply the calm statement of a fixed resolve. Haynes gazed at her in curiosity and surprise. He could scarcely realize that this dignified woman before him was the recently fiery and passionate Hilda Corrode.

"You will have small chance of doing anything else," he said, with a sneer, "hampered with that brat."

Hilda's eyes flashed, but she controlled herself and answered in the same quiet manner.

"I do not fear the future. God will have compassion upon a repentant sinner, and find work and

bread for us both. I will pray for that and for strength."

Haynes threw back his head, and laughed with malignant insolence.

"You will pray!" he exclaimed. "Ah! I should like to hear that! There must be something rather precious in the prayers of a——"

But the words died away on his lips, as Hilda, with a cry of mingled rage and horror, sprang toward him. All her calmness had vanished. Her cheeks were aflame, her eyes ablaze. She was no longer the repentant Magdalen, but an outraged mother, determined to screen her guilty past from her child.

"Don't say it," she cried, with a savage passion. "Don't call a mother that before her child! Have a care, Rodney Haynes!"

In spite of himself, Haynes was awed.

"A care for you!" he said, attempting to bluster it out, but yet in a voice that was a trifle unsteady.

"Yes, for me!" retorted Hilda, in tones of menace that cut the air like a knife. "Ere my child should know what you have made me I would kill you!"

Haynes quailed before the look on her face. He knew that she meant just what she said, and he thought better of his purpose.

Lelia crept forward and caught one of her mother's hands, which hung by her side.

"Mamma, don't! don't!" she pleaded, softly and fearfully.

"Don't be alarmed, youngster," said Haynes, forcing a laugh. "Mamma's only got 'em again." Then he addressed the woman whose life he had

ruined, but with a much more moderate manner than he had used heretofore. "Your heroics are wasted, Hilda. As far as you are concerned, you and the incumbrance can go to the devil. But, before you depart, I must ask you one question."

Hilda had knelt down by the side of the little girl and taken her in her arms.

"Well?" she asked, raising her eyes.

"The address where my amiable cousin has hidden herself."

Hilda started to her feet. What, put the sleuth hound once more on the track of the quarry whose scent he had lost! Subject Queenie to further danger, the girl who had forgiven her and restored to her her child? Never! She would cut out her tongue before it should speak the words.

"I will not tell you," she answered, firmly.

But Haynes, having her there in his power and with the knowledge she had which he was so anxious to possess, was determined not to be baffled. He reflected rapidly as to what it was best to do, and then his sensual lips parted in a smile, as there occurred to him a project which would certainly force her to speak.

"Mark!" he called, and Blackwood came forth from the shadows where he had been lurking, a silent listener to the previous scene. "Lock that door!"

The man, without a word, did as he was told.

As soon as the key clicked in the lock, Haynes advanced to Hilda, and seized her by the wrist.

"Now, my lady, come here!" he said, forcing her a little to one side.

Hilda was brave enough, but she knew that physically she was no match for these two powerful men.

"What would you do?" she asked, her cheeks paling.

"Wait!" he answered, roughly, tightening his grasp. "Mark, open the trap!"

For an instant, with an inkling of the truth, Blackwood hesitated. Then he flung aside the heavy rug, and, catching hold of an iron ring, raised the trap door.

Poor little Lelia tried to reach her mother, but Haynes, with his disengaged hand kept her off.

"Seize the child, Mark," he commanded, "and hold her out of reach."

Blackwood caught the little girl, careful, however, not to hurt her.

"Now, come here!" proceeded Haynes, addressing himself now to Hilda.

As he spoke he dragged her to the trap, and pointed to the yawning black pit below.

"You know what that is. A body thrown there would cause but a splash. There would be none to hear. And soon unknown, unseen, the victim would be carried out to sea, while London is sleeping."

Hilda shuddered.

"You would not murder me!" she gasped.

"Murder you!" replied Haynes, with a short laugh. "No! For there are those who would miss you. But there is one here who will not be missed, and who will not be inquired for."

As she grasped his meaning a cry of agonized horror burst from Hilda's lips.

"Leila!"

For answer Haynes seized her other hand and held them both in a vise-like grip. Then he turned to Blackwood.

"Take the child to the edge of the trap, Mark."

Blackwood came forward with the helpless little girl in his arms.

White as death, and endeavoring in vain to wrest herself free, Hilda shrieked:

"Haynes, you can't mean it! You can't be such a fiend!"

"Can I not? Mark," slowly and distinctly, "when I have counted three, raise the child, drop her to the river, and close the trap."

It was the refinement of torture, and the agonized mother was nearly insane.

"Man! Man!" she cried, appealing to Blackwood. "You cannot be so vile as he. Neither my child nor I have ever injured you! Help us!"

Haynes gave his henchman one rapid glance, in which there was both threat and promise, and then he said, in a hard, merciless voice:

"You have nothing to expect from him. It's more than his life is worth to disobey. Now, then, Queenie's address!"

"She helped me! She saved me! I cannot! I will not!"

"One!"

The word fell upon Hilda's ear like a death sentence, and yet it would be an act of Judas

to speak, even in order to save her child. With inarticulate moans and cries she struggled to free herself. But all in vain. Her strength was as nothing against that of her cowardly persecutor.

"Two!"

Mark raised the child high above the trap.

"Now, will you tell it!!"

It is probable that the little girl did not fully realize her danger, but still she called out fearlessly:

"Don't, mamma, don't you! You promised the kind lady that you wouldn't. I'm not afraid!"

"Then die!" exclaimed Haynes brutally. "Three!"

It is more than doubtful if Blackwood would have obeyed his master to the last extent, and have committed the dastardly crime exacted of him, but before he could move or speak, Hilda, at the end of her endurance, and moved by a sudden inspiration, screamed:

"Church Road, Bayswater!"

"And the number!"

"Twelve!"

"Good!" exclaimed Haynes, exultantly, as he flung her from him, her wrists all bruised and bleeding. "Close the trap, now, Mark."

Blackwood placed Leila upon the ground, and the little girl ran to her mother, where she was clasped in a passionate embrace.

"Now, then," said Haynes, "clear out of this quick! Do you hear? And don't let me see either of your ugly faces again!"

And, beckoning Mark to follow him, he strode

from the room, rejoicing at the success of his inquisitorial measures.

But, shrewd and unscrupulous as he was, for once he had been overreached, by one who in spite of the ineffable torment to which she had been subjected, had proved herself cleverer than he.

For, Hilda Corrode had given the wrong address.

At least for a time Queenie was safe. But when Haynes should find out how he had been duped, what would happen then?

"Come, mamma, come," said Leila, trying to draw her away, "there is no one here now. Let us run away together."

Hilda for the moment was at her wits' ends to know just what it was best to do.

"But where, my darling, where?" she said, glancing wildly about her. "There is no place this man would not seek us to wreak his vengeance. I have you in my arms again only to bring further danger upon you. You, my little one, whom I love better than my own life."

And she covered the sweet face of the child with kisses.

Then, rising to her feet, she endeavored to collect her thoughts.

Leila clung close to her.

"I don't mind, mamma," she said, encouragingly, "so long as I am with you."

"But we must part again, dear," groaned her unfortunate mother. "I am powerless to protect my only treasure. I must hide you. But where? How?"

Leila was intelligent far beyond her years. She,

too, took the matter into consideration, and then she said, suddenly:

"Let us go to the pretty lady's again, mamma."

Hilda uttered a cry of delight. Yes, this was exactly the thing. Queenie had forgiven her, and she surely would not refuse a place of shelter in this hour of dire extremity. But it must be for Leila alone. She herself must remain there to throw the bloodhounds off the track.

"Yes, yes, my darling!" she exclaimed, excitedly. "You shall go to the pretty lady's. Come quickly, come!"

She took the little girl by the hand and led her into the hall. A servant was standing at the half open front door, engaged in a discussion with some one outside.

Hilda caught a glimpse of the latter, and, with a quickly formed plan in her mind, she hurried forward and ordered the servant to admit the person who had evidently been asking to be allowed to enter.

The servant, who had no reason to suppose that Hilda was not still mistress of the house, at once obeyed.

He stepped aside, and a girl of about twenty came into the hall. She might have been pretty, had it not been for her glittering yellow hair, which was only too evidently dyed, the splashes of rouge upon her cheeks, and the expression of recklessness in her eyes.

The servant closed the door carefully and disappeared.

The girl, who belonged to that unfortunate class of women who have put themselves forever outside the pale of respectable society, and who had been a frequent visitor to Helliwell Mansion until its portals were closed, greeted Hilda effusively, and then suddenly interrupting herself, she went on with a curious and yet not unsympathetic gleam at Hilda's white cheeks and heavy eyes.

"Why, what's up? You look like death!"

Hilda was well acquainted with this girl, who went by the name of Maudie de Frere, and she knew that in spite of her many and grievous faults, she had a kind heart. At all events, she was forced to trust her in her present straits.

"Maudie," she said, speaking rapidly and very earnestly, "I need a friend. I am in great, great trouble, and I want your help."

"And you shall have it, old girl," replied Maudie, heartily, if vulgarly. "What's the row?"

"My child is in danger."

"What! the little pickanniny here," with a kindly glance at Leila, who was gazing in shy wonder at the flashily dressed lady before her. "Who from?"

"Haynes."

"Oh!" ejaculated Maudie, with a sententious nod of her yellow head.

"I want you to take her right away now to an address I will give you," proceeded Hilda. "There she will be in safety."

"Right you are!" agreed Maudie, who, to do her justice, was only too glad to be of any assistance.

Neither of them noticed that a door close by, lead-

ing to what had formerly been a smoking room, was opened ever so little. Mark Blackwood had been ordered to watch and follow Hilda if necessary, and he was fulfilling the commands laid upon him.

"Explain to Miss Carruthers," said Hilda, "and say that I will write to-morrow."

"I twig. And the address?"

Blackwood strained his ears.

"Ashborne Villa, Richmond Road, St. John's Wood."

The door was noiselessly closed. All Hilda's cleverness had been in vain. The secret she had suffered so much to keep was divulged.

"I've got it in my nut," said Maudie, cheerfully. "Come along, dearie," holding out her hand to Leila.

"Good-by, my darling!" exclaimed Hilda, passionately. "Don't fret. Mamma will soon see her little girl again."

"Dear mamma!" murmured Leila. "Kiss me again and I will be brave, and say a prayer every night that God will bless and keep you safe!"

"And He will surely hearken," sobbed Hilda, the tears rolling down her cheeks. "Good-by, my beloved one. Good-by till the day breaks, and the sun shines out again."

In another moment, Leila, under the odd but kindly guidance of Maudie de Frere, was on her way to what her mother believed would be a safe shelter. But it was a long way to St. John's Wood, and the busses are slow. Cabs are much faster, especially when a liberal tip has been promised the driver.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FOR DEAR LIFE'S SAKE.

The bells had just chimed the hour of midnight. It was a rarely beautiful night. Every star was at its post and shining out its best.

Just over the trees of the garden of the villa in St. John's Wood was a great cluster, and in their midst clearly defined against the dark sky Queenie fancied that she could read the name "David."

She was very happy to-night as she stood at the window of her drawing-room and gazed out at the beauty of the heavens. David had been with her all the evening, and it was arranged that they were to be married very shortly. Just this last engagement at the Indian Exhibition and then he was to abandon the profession forever. His last scruples in regard to allying himself to one so rich as Queenie had become, had been vanquished. His love had triumphed over them. He had a little property of his own, left him by his father, who had been a highly respected country lawyer, enough to render him independent. Then, too, he felt very strongly that Queenie needed a protector.

It seemed to Queenie that her troubles were all over, and that her future was as clear and cloudless as the exquisite sky above her. And yet even then,

the plot was gradually being woven which was to involve her in more deadly peril than any she had as yet experienced.

"Queenie!"

She turned with a start, brought back from heaven to earth.

"Who's there?"

"It's only me, dear," said Mrs. Jones' pleasant voice. "I'm so glad you've not gone to bed yet. There's a very impudent-looking person in the hall who wants to see you. She has Hilda Corrode's child with her. The idea of coming at this time of night!"

"Whoever can it be?" exclaimed Queenie in surprise. "Let her come in."

"Very well, dear. Don't let her stay long, and then I'll go to bed, for I'm clean tuckered out."

A minute or two afterward, Maudie de Frere, appeared, leading little Leila by the hand.

The little girl at once ran to the "pretty lady."

Queenie kissed her tenderly, and then turning to the gaudily-dressed girl who had accompanied her, asked, courteously:

"You bring a message, I presume?"

"Yes," replied Maudie, feeling a strange sense of shame in the presence of this girl with her pure, high-bred face, "from Hilda. Her child is in danger. She knows no one but you to send it to for safety, and if you will keep Leila here she will write you to-morrow."

"Certainly," replied Queenie, cordially. "You can say I shall be glad to have her."

"That's all right, then," said Maudie, who was anxious to get away. "Good-night."

"Good-night."

And Queenie held out her hand.

But Maudie made no movement to take it. Indeed, she half hid her own in the folds of her gown.

"Wait a moment," she said, part in humiliation, part in defiance. "If you don't remember me, I do you."

Queenie looked at her more scrutinizingly than she had done before.

"I think I have seen you somewhere," she said. "But where?"

"I will tell you. It was at Helliwell Mansion."

Queenie involuntarily shrank back, as is the first instinct of any good woman when brought into contact with one of Maudie de Frere's class.

"You see!" said Maudie, with a bitter laugh. "Do you want to shake hands with me now? You don't! I was right when I told you to wait."

"I don't wish to be unkind," said Queenie, falteringly, "and if you need help——"

"Oh, yes," interrupted Maudie, not rudely, and yet with intense feeling. "You're full of help, you good people! You show us the sin of our daily life, shut us up in homes, imprison us in penitentiaries, try to make us godly on bread and water, tracts and long sermons. But there's not one of you will touch our hands, kiss our cheeks, and by sisterly love make us feel that, fallen as we are, we are still flesh and blood like you who have never known temptation. Good-night, Leila!"

Leila, who naturally did not understand what all this meant, went to her confidingly and lifted up her sweet lips.

The unfortunate girl touched them lightly with her own.

"My kiss does not hurt you, does it, dearie?" she asked, crushing back a sob.

"Oh, no," exclaimed Lelia, in surprised denial. "You bought me some beautiful chocolates, and I love you very much."

And a little child shall lead them! Queenie's heart smote her. She felt that she had been harsh and cruel, and entirely false to her own self.

She came forward now with hand extended.

"Forgive me," she said, gently and penitently. "I have seen but little of the world, and at first was startled. See, there is my hand now. I am sorry for you, and, if you will let me, will be your friend."

Maudie was touched, and the tears sprang to her eyes. There were impulses for good in the poor girl still.

She took Queenie's hand and kissed it.

"My life has been a very miserable one, Miss Carruthers," she said, hoarsely, "and I had no mother to teach me right from wrong."

"In that case, we are sisters," said Queenie, softly, her own eyes glistening with unshed tears.

"Go now. Come to me to-morrow, and I will aid you to a better life."

"How good you are!" murmured Maudie, in all sincerity.

"No, not I!" Queenie hastened to disclaim. "A

large fortune has been left me in trust for those who sorrow and are heavy laden. It is late. Good-night now, till to-morrow."

"Good-night."

Queenie hesitated an inappreciable instant, and then, going quickly to the side of the poor, erring girl, she raised her head and kissed her on the lips.

"Good-night, sister."

Crying softly, Maudie went from the room.

"Poor Maudie," said Leila, sympathetically, while her brown eyes were big with wonder. "Why does she cry, kind lady?"

"Because she has heard good news," replied Queenie, putting her arm about the child and drawing her toward her. "We do not always cry because we are sad."

Leila could not quite comprehend this.

"Poor mamma does," she declared. "And she cried so hard to-night, lady."

Queenie thought it was better to change the subject.

"You must not call me that," she said, with a smile. "You must say my name—Queenie."

"Oh, what a pretty name!" exclaimed Leila admiringly. "And it just suits you, for you look like one of the beautiful queens I read about in my fairy tales."

"You little flatterer!" said Queenie, laughing, and kissing her. She was beginning to feel very much attached to this gentle little creature. "But come now, you must go to bed. It is very late for little girlies to be up."

As she spoke she put out the lights, and Leila's hand nestled in hers, led the way into the hall, and then, taking up the lighted candle, which had been left there for her, went up the stairs with Leila to her own chamber, having determined to keep the little girl with her that night.

The house was very still, all the rest of the inmates having retired.

Queenie's room was in an ell at the back of the house, Mrs. Jones and Carrie sleeping in the front, some distance away. Queenie had chosen this room because it had windows on three sides, and she was fond of air and light.

It was a large apartment, furnished with sombre but handsome old-fashioned furniture.

With tender hands Queenie undressed the child, and after having heard her say her prayers, in which was asked a blessing for the mother, of whom Leila knew no evil, she tucked her up carefully, put out the candle so that the light might not keep the little one awake, and then went and sat down by the window.

She was not sleepy, and she had much to think about. That poor little waif! Surely her tiny voice, upraised in prayer, must have pierced the clouds and reached to heaven. Ah! the sin of mighty London rocked her cradle and its shadow loomed dark and threatening on her onward path!

Queenie leaned her head forward until it rested against one of the heavy iron rods with which the window was barred. This brought her thoughts to David, for had he not insisted on this protection to

every window of her chamber. Dear David! How kind and thoughtful he always was!

But if David Engleheart could have known the danger his betrothed was in at that very moment, he would scarcely have been smiling so happily to himself as he wended his way through the quiet streets to his lodgings.

For Rodney Haynes was there in that room with Queenie, and in another minute she would be at his mercy.

Mark Blackwood had lost no time in acquainting his master with the information he had overheard, and, without giving any thought just then to Hilda and the deception she had practiced upon him, Haynes had started at once for St. John's Wood.

Arrived at Ashbourne Villa, he had found no difficulty in penetrating to the garden. Creeping cautiously nearer and nearer to the house, he hid himself behind some bushes just as David Engleheart and Queenie emerged from one of the French windows of the drawing-room.

Chance favored him, for, from a few words of David's regarding the bars to the windows, he learned which was Queenie's chamber and at once his villainous plot was formed.

David was about to depart and Queenie accompanied him to the street gate.

Now was Haynes' opportunity. He darted through the window of the drawing-room and made his way into the hall. No one was up in the house, except Mrs. Jones, and she was dozing peacefully upon the porch. It was a simple matter to locate Queenie's

room, and Haynes soon found himself within those precincts which should have been sacred to him.

He lighted a match and looked about him. In one corner of the room was a large mahogany wardrobe, whch would serve admirably as a hiding place, and he was behind its doors when Queenie entered the room with Leila.

The presence of the child was unfortunate, but he would not allow that to interfere with his projects.

As soon as he thought the child was asleep he came softly from the wardrobe and stole across the room to the door. This he locked and put the key in his pocket.

He had made no noise, but that instinct which sometimes tells us of the presence of a person near us, even though we see no one, warned Queenie that some one else beside herself and Leila was in the room.

With a vague uneasiness, she rose and relighted the candle. As the flame flared up she saw not six feet from her the hateful, mocking face of the man she feared and hated the most in the world.

"Rodney Haynes!" she cried, with a scream, her heart seeming to stop its beating.

"Yes, my dear cousin," said Haynes, imperturbably. "Excuse my abrupt intrusion. It wasn't convenient for me to send in my visiting card."

Queenie, with a mad desire to escape, made a rush for the door, but of course it resisted all her efforts.

"Locked!" laughed Haynes. "And the key is in my pocket!"

Queenie turned leaning back against the wall as if for support.

"Rodney Haynes," she began in a voice which shook in spite of all her efforts to control it, "I do not ask you how you came here, or what is your purpose, but I command you to leave this room at once!"

With a satirical smile upon his face, Haynes calmly seated himself.

"No fear of that!" he said, with the utmost nonchalance. "I am too comfortable where I am. Besides, my dear cousin, I am master of the situation and it is my turn now to command."

It seemed to Queenie as if the blood was turning to ice in her veins, but she forced herself into something approaching calmness.

"Every moment you remain in this room imperils my good name! Every word you speak is an insult to my honor!"

"Precisely," assented Haynes, with another evil smile. "That is what I am staying for. No one has seen me enter, and I will take care that in broad daylight everybody sees me go out."

This cynical statement drove Queenie frantic with horror. She flung herself against the door, beating upon the panel and screaming for help.

"No good, my dear," said Haynes. "You are a long way from the rest of the house. No one will hear you."

A prey to despair, Queenie ceased her efforts.

"Rodney Haynes," she said, quivering from head to foot, "but a few days ago you were boasting of

the noble lives our ancestors led before us. How they would blush if they could look down upon you now!"

Haynes shrugged his shoulders. He had long ago become impervious to any feeling of shame or remorse.

"Ah! they're too busy where they are. You see, being quite in my power, you had better listen to my proposal."

She made no reply in words, but motioned him to proceed.

"What I propose is simply this," he said, drawing a folded document from his pocket and laying it down upon the table beside him. "That you sign this paper, makin , over to me half the fortune my uncle gave you."

The color was slowly coming back into Queenie's cheeks. She was beginning to recover from her first fright, and already her brain was at work, endeavoring to discover some way to outwit this scoundrel.

"Never!" she cried, spiritedly. "Do you hear? Never! With this money I intend to relieve those who suffer and are in want, and I won't rob the poor to feed the vices of a libertine like you!"

Haynes was not greatly disappointed at this rejection of his proposal. He had scarcely hoped to succeed at first. But he was by no means at the end of his resources.

"Then you know the consequences," he said, rising.

"I do not fear them. I will go from this room,

as you say, in broad daylight, and face the world fearlessly, guiltlessly."

"Will you?" he said, advancing toward her, with an evil leer upon his face. "Don't make too sure!"

"Stand back!" cried Queenie, her very soul filled with dread and loathing.

"Who can make me do that?"

A little white figure darted between them. It was Leila, who brave little woman that she was, had crept from her bed, and now interposed her weak form between the lady who had been so kind to her and the danger which she knew, without understanding, threatened her.

"Papa!" she cried. "What are you doing here?"

Haynes paused. He had forgotten the child. Then, with a furious oath, he exclaimed:

"Stand aside! Do you hear?"

"I will not!" replied Leila, dauntlessly. "I'm only a little girl, but you shall kill me before you touch my dear good Queenie."

Foaming with rage, Haynes yelled:

"You imp! I'll——"

He stretched out his hand to seize her, but before he could touch her Queenie had caught the child and swung her to one side. Then, with an impulse of ungovernable passion, which she had never experienced in her life before, she raised her hand, and, with all her strength, struck Haynes full across the face.

Taken completely by surprise, he recoiled. As he did so, with a flash of memory which was little short of providential, Queenie darted to the bureau, flung

open one of the drawers, and snatched up a revolver which lay there. It was one that had been given her that very morning by David, but she had forgotten it until that moment.

Haynes, with convulsed face, was again advancing toward her, but she leveled the weapon at his head, and brought him to a standstill.

"You thought I was entirely friendless!" she cried, with a wild burst of hysterical laughter. "You see, you were wrong!"

For an instant Haynes was nonplussed. He did not know what to do next. Finally, after a short reflection, he said, and really believing it as well:

"What's a revolver in the hands of a woman? You wouldn't know how to fire it."

But here, to his cost, he was entirely mistaken.

"Wouldn't I?" cried Queenie, with flashing eyes, ready now to do anything, everything to protect herself. "See!"

A sharp report rang out. Haynes uttered a cry of pain as his left arm fell powerless to his side.

Queenie's nearest and dearest would not have recognized her at that moment. She was no longer the gentle, clinging girl, but a determined woman, resolved to defend herself and her honor at all costs.

"You seem to forget," she exclaimed, with savage exultation, "how many I have fired on the slack-wire in the circus! I winged your left arm so that your right should be free to unlock that door! There are five more chambers loaded. Now, go, while you are safe!"

Once again she covered him with the revolver.

Haynes, with fiendish rage in his breast, knew that he was beaten. He slunk across the room, like the whipped cur he was, and unlocked the door. But even then his native cunning did not desert him. He had the presence of mind to slip the key from the lock.

He had no sooner disappeared than, womanlike, all Queenie's fortitude deserted her. The revolver slipped from her hand, and, sinking half fainting upon the floor, she burst into a torrent of sobs and tears.

In an instant Lelia's little arms were about her neck.

"Don't cry, Queenie, dear," she murmured, consolingly. "We're safe now."

With a supreme effort, Queenie managed to regain to a certain extent her composure.

"Yes, safe now, my child," she said, as soon as she could control her voice, "but who knows for how long?"

As was only natural, Queenie was discouraged and distrustful of the future. For one bitter moment she doubted if, in all that great city, there was one honest heart. That man, like a dark shadow, was ever pursuing her. The fortune that had been left as a blessing was proving a curse, and its weight was crushing her.

Then she thrust aside these unhappy thoughts, and essayed to quiet the child before putting her to bed again.

But suddenly Lelia started from her arms.

"Listen, Queenie," she cried, exctiedly, "don't you hear a funny noise?"

"It's nothing, dear," answered Queenie, reassuringly, "only one of the strange noises of the night. Come, now we'll go to bed."

"No! no! Hark, there it is again."

And then Queenie did hear it. It was a queer, crackling sound, and proceeded from the hall outside. As she was about to investigate a red gleam shone from beneath the door.

She started back with a cry of dread and horror. It was fire! Rodney Haynes had set fire to the house!

Catching Leila by the hand, she rushed to the door and tried it. It was locked on the outside. Oh, for strength to break it down, but that she, a frail girl, did not possess. Her foot struck against the pistol she had dropped upon the floor, and this gave her an idea. She caught up the weapon and fired it at close range at the lock. The shot told. The lock was shattered into a score of pieces.

Queenie pulled open the door, but only to close it even more quickly. The hall was a mass of flames.

Like an animal caught in a trap, she glanced wildly about for means of escape. The windows were barred. What David had intended as a means of protection were likely to prove exactly the contrary.

The fire was gaining ground. The menacing scarlet glare was growing brighter and brighter and the roar of the flames louder and louder.

"God help us! God help us!" she moaned despairingly.

Then as she raised her eyes to heaven, it seemed as if her prayer were answered.

In the ceiling just above the wardrobe was a trap door that led to the roof. It was a chance. This might prove a way to life.

Queenie's brain worked with that marvelous celerity which desperate situations generally inspire. She pushed a table up against the wardrobe. Then tearing a sheet from the bed, she mounted first upon the table and so to the top of the wardrobe. To unbolt the trap door and fling it open was the work of but a moment.

The flames were now licking the door, and one ugly bloodlike line was creeping across the floor.

Queenie shrilly commanded Lelia to climb up upon the table, and, then, lowering the sheet she drew the child up beside her.

It was no difficult task for them to clamber through the trapdoor to the flat roof above.

The cool night air was delicious after the horrible heat of the room below.

But were they any nearer to safety than before? On one side was the garden. To leap down was certain death.

On the other, some forty feet away, was another villa. Oh, if its roof could only be reached! Yes, there was a way, a desperate one, but still possible.

From one roof to the other stretched a telegraph wire. It was not as heavy as the one Queenie had been accustomed to walk in the circus. Would it bear their weight? Heaven alone could tell.

Her face gleaming ghastly white in the moonlight,

Queenie bent over the little girl by her side, a brave little girl too she had proved herself, for not a whimper had escaped from her.

"Now, Leila, darling, courage! Climb on my back! Quick! Quick!"

This latter as a volume of flame and smoke burst through the trapdoor.

Queenie placed her foot upon the wire. It trembled and swayed beneath her touch. The White Queen of the Slack Wire was about to attempt her greatest feat, and two lives were the price of her success or failure.

Slowly foot by foot she advanced over the vacillating metal cord. She was dimly conscious that beneath her there was a little knot of people who were watching her progress with bated breath.

Once she tottered and seemed about to fall. A muffled cry went up on the night air, as Carrie Jones sank half fainting into her mother's arms.

But, thank heaven, the alarm was a false one! Queenie quickly recovered her balance, and the perilous journey was resumed.

The longed-for haven, the roof of the other villa, was now ten feet away, now five, now one, and at last it was reached in safety.

A mad cheer of relief and joy went up from below as Queenie, the terrible strain removed, sank down unconscious.

Ah! there is a power above your wickedness, Rodney Haynes, and it has saved those whom you would have destroyed!

CHAPTER XIX.

DESPERATE!

Once more Rodney Haynes was in the Escape Room. He was pale, haggard and unshaven. There was a wild light in his eyes, the light of incipient insanity.

For two days of awful solitude, he had been alone in that dreadful place, the house closed, the servants flown. The deathly silence was driving him mad. If there were only some living creature near him, if he could but hear the sound of a human voice! At times he felt inclined to rush forth and risk it all. Anything was better than this suspense.

He started and shivered at every noise.

Ah! this time it was a footstep! Queenie had denounced him. They were coming to arrest him. Where could he hide?

But before he could decide, the footsteps came nearer and nearer, and Mark Blackwood entered the room. He was in the uniform of an attendant at the Indian Exhibition.

As he recognized him so intense was the relief that Haynes burst into a frenzied peal of laughter.

"Ah, Mark!" he exclaimed, in a voice not far removed from a shriek. "Only you! How you startled me!"

Mark grinned. He thoroughly enjoyed Haynes' terror.

"Thought it was the police, eh, captain?" he said, slily.

"I am full of strange fancies," replied Haynes, passing his hand mechanically over his forehead. "It's this terrible solitude."

"You look a little off," observed Mark, looking at him with a satisfaction he took no pains to conceal. "Times are changed, Captain. It is you who have most to fear the law now."

Haynes shuddered, and he glanced about him with a hunted look.

"Stow that!" he exclaimed, roughly, and with something of his old masterful manner. "If I fall you go to quod with me. So be careful to keep your word."

Mark had no intention of not doing this. He wanted his reward, and, more than this, he was quite well aware that if he played false Haynes would not hesitate, be the consequences what they might, to denounce him to the authorities.

"Right!" he said, with a curt nod of the head. "To the end of the week, but only till then, I am your very obedient servant. You say you are alone here. Where's Miss Corrode?"

An oath sprang from Haynes' lips.

"She disappeared on the night of the fire, and is now at the devil I hope. Any news?"

"All London is ringing with the story of Miss Carruthers' brave escape with the kid. She's the

lion of the hour. A pretty bungle you made of that job with all your cleverness."

Haynes smote his hands together in impotent fury. "Curse her!" he ejaculated, fiercely. "But I'll have another try for the fortune! So," after a pause and glancing at Mark's uniform, "they took you on at the exhibition, did they?"

"Yes, I look after the Temple of Somnath."

"What the devil's that?"

"The place where the suttee is in full work. It's rather dangerous, so I am on guard all the time the temple is open."

"Dangerous! How?" asked Haynes, idly.

"Well, you see, it's a perfect representation of the manner in which the Hindoos burn the widows with their departed husbands. To make it more realistic, at frequent intervals the pyre is fired from beneath and flames up just as it would if it held a real victim."

A real victim! Rodney Haynes was no longer listless. His brain, inflamed as it was almost to the point of insanity, had conceived a project, born of Mark's description.

"And David Engleheart appears there to-morrow," he said, slowly and musingly.

"Yes," replied Mark, "in the grounds. But they say he will be there only for a few days. He and Miss Carruthers are to be married almost immediately."

"Not if I can help it!" cried Haynes, with savage determination. Then suddenly turning toward his

companion, he went on excitedly, "See here, Mark! I must be there. You must find a way——"

"You're raving, man!" interrupted Blackwood, in all honesty. "You'd be nabbed for certain."

But Haynes waved his hand scornfully and resolutely.

"I tell you I must see this Engleheart! She, too, is sure to be there. I'll make one more venture for the money."

Mark looked at him curiously. He was interested, for he knew that he would undoubtedly be called upon to lend a hand.

"What can you do?" he asked.

Haynes was now abnormally excited by the ideas with which his brain was teeming. His cheeks were flushed, and his eyes gleamed unnaturally.

"The lover out of the way, who'll defend her?" he cried. "The girl out of the way the money must come to me as next of kin."

Mark shook his head. For more reasons than one he was opposed to what these words unmistakably hinted at.

"Don't risk it, captain!" he protested, earnestly. "It will mean the gallows if you fail."

A look of grim resolve appeared upon Haynes' face.

"If I fail I'll end it myself without the hangman's help," he replied, significantly. "You must get me some disguise."

Blackwood thought a moment and then he said:

"I have it. There are lots of the native costumes

lying about the exhibition. I'll collar one, and bring it the first thing in the morning."

"Good! Now go and don't fail me!"

"Never fear!" replied Mark, confidently, as he moved toward the door. "By the way," turning, "I suppose there's plenty of booze left in the Mansion. You haven't got through the lot yourself, have you?"

"By Jove, I've tried to the last few days," laughed Haynes. "You'll find plenty downstairs. And perhaps you'd better bring me up a bottle of brandy before you go."

"Take my advice, captain, keep off it!" returned Blackwood, warningly. "You've got a big job on hand to-morrow, and will want a clear head, a steady hand."

Left alone, Rodney Haynes began to pace restlessly and excitedly up and down the floor, ever and anon muttering aloud to himself.

A clear head! A steady hand! Yes, with this fearful purpose surging in his brain. What had Mark Blackwood said? The very pyre where the Hindoos burned their defenseless women. At frequent intervals it is fired from beneath, and flares up just as if it held a real victim.

"A real victim," he repeated, aloud, in a hoarse, chuckling whisper that in the silence of that desolate room sounded uncanny. "I wonder, I wonder who would aid her then!"

CHAPTER XX.

A GUARD OF THE HEATHEN.

The Indian Exhibition was the rage of London, both fashionable and unfashionable, and all classes of society thronged there. It was really a very interesting place, giving, as it did, a clear and succinct picture of the different phases of the great Indian Empire.

On this particular Saturday afternoon it was more than usually crowded, for the Star of the Air, whose provincial fame had reached London, was to make his first appearance in what was announced as his last professional engagement. Additional interest was obtained from the fact that it was generally known he was the betrothed husband of the young girl whose brave and marvelous escape from the burning house was on every one's tongue.

Of course Queenie went to the Exhibition in order to be present at David's performance, and so did Mrs. Jones, Carrie and Sammy Blythe. The latter was in the seventh heaven of delight, for that very morning Miss Caroline Jones had promised to take upon herself the matrimonial vows and become Mrs. Samuel Blythe the same day that made Dave and Queenie one. Sammy suited at last.

Not the least attractive spot in the Exhibition was the so-called Temple of Somnath. It was a circular building of the shape of the Colosseum, only much smaller, and with no roof. It was fitted up in exact imitation of a Hindoo temple. The walls were gorgeously decorated in red, black and yellow. At one end towered an enormous, gem-bedecked Indian idol, with an ugly, sinister face and arms as many as those of the famed Briareus. Below the pedestal on which the idol rested was a suttee altar, piled with faggots.

This was the place of which Mark Blackwood was the custodian. On this particular afternoon he was in anything but a cheerful frame of mind. He was in an unpleasant state of suspense, knowing that some dastardly act was in contemplation, and that he would be called upon to enact his part. He swore to himself, however, that the money which was to set him free once in his possession he would never again become Rodney Haynes' slave.

He had fulfilled his promise, procured one of the Hindoo costumes, and assisted Haynes to make himself up so like one of the dark-skinned attendants that even his closest acquaintance would not have known him unless he spoke.

But he had not appeared yet, and Blackwood in spite of the money he was in such sore need of, was almost hoping he would not, when his quick eyes caught sight of two people entering the temple, by whom he did not care to be recognized. He, therefore, slipped behind the colossal figure of the idol. There his arm was caught in a nervous grasp, and Rodney

Haynes' voice warned him, in a rancous whisper, that the time for action was close at hand.

The two visitors, the advent of whom had caused Blackwood to hide himself, were David Engleheart and Queenie Carruthers.

Queenie had entirely recovered from her trying experience of a few nights before, and was looking wonderfully beautiful in a costume of pale shades of gray and blue, that was exceedingly becoming to her delicate coloring.

"Oh, David," she exclaimed, as she entered the Temple, "what an odd and yet impressive place."

"It is the Temple of Somnath," replied David, his eyes resting lovingly and proudly upon her exquisite face. "The place where all the native religious rites are observed."

Queenie gazed about her with a sort of awe.

"And that colossal figure there?" she queried.

"The most dreadful of all the Heathen deities, the awful Somnath. I was allowed to examine it yesterday. It is quite hollow, and, when appealed to by the ignorant idol-worshippers, a priest secreted inside sends tongues of flame from the eyes and mouth to persuade them that their god hears and answers."

"And this strange altar?" asked Queenie, indicating the suttee.

"The Brahmin widow was chained there with the corpse of her husband, and slowly consumed by fire—the dead with the living."

Queenie shuddered, and, drawing close to David, slipped her hand within his arm.

"How horrible!" she murmured. "We ought to be thankful that we were born in a Christian land where such terrors are unknown."

"And now, sweetheart," said David, "it is time for me to dress."

Queenie glanced up to where, above the walls of the temple could be seen the lofty scaffolding which supported the trapeze.

"Oh, David," she said, "think of the thousands that will be gazing up at you, and I shall be the proudest of them all, knowing that you belong to me."

"Always!" he answered fervently, bending to kiss the sweet, red lips.

Then he added, loath to leave her alone:

"But where can Mrs. Jones and Carrie be?"

"Don't you wait for me, dear," protested Queenie. "They are sure to come before your turn."

"But won't you feel nervous remaining here alone?"

"Why should I? This is a public place. None can harm me here."

"True," assented David, although still strangely reluctant to leave her. "I shall look down for you among the crowd."

If he could only have known under what circumstances he was to view her from the height of that lofty trapeze!

"How can you see me in the midst of the multitude?" asked Queenie, smiling.

"No multitude could hide you from me," replied

David, tenderly. "Love has eyes that can pierce the densest crowd."

Queenie watched him until he had disappeared, with joy and pride in her heart. How bright and beautiful the world looked to her to-day! Safe in the love of the man she had chosen, young, rich, happy, where was there a luckier girl in all London than Queenie Carruthers?

Absorbed in her contemplation of the many wonders of the temple, Queenie did not observe that the few visitors had left, nor did she notice the man who glided from behind the altar and fastened every means of egress.

When at last she realized that it must be time for David's performance she found herself locked in—a prisoner.

She was not particularly alarmed at first. She supposed that the temple must have been closed until the open-air programme was concluded. But gradually the deadly stillness of the place oppressed her, and filled her with a nameless dread. That terrible figure of Somnath seemed to be gazing down upon her with eyes full of a threatening anger.

She looked up and saw on the trapeze without the figure of David. The performance had begun.

She could endure that dreadful place no longer. She was about to go to one of the doors and call for aid to be released, when there emerged from behind the huge idol a man in Hindoo costume.

Ah! he could tell her how to get out. She started toward him, and then paused as if turned to stone,

as the tones of a well-known, detested voice fell upon her ear.

"Well met, my fair cousin."

"You! You here!" she managed to gasp, as she recognized him beneath his disguise.

"Yes, cousin mine, and all for the pleasure of seeing your fair face again." Then, with a quick change from this mocking courtesy he called out in a tone of command: "Seize her, Mark!"

At this Mark Blackwood appeared from his hiding place. It was in vain for Queenie to struggle. In less than a minute she was overpowered, and her hands firmly tied behind her back.

Then Haynes laughed aloud, a horrible, grating laugh.

"Alone, defenseless and at my mercy at last."

But Queenie's spirit was not conquered.

"What villain's work is this?" she demanded, indignantly.

"Mark, go out of earshot," ordered Haynes. "My charming cousin and I have some family matters to discuss."

Mark retired a short distance.

"You do not seem afraid," said Haynes, surveying her critically, gloatingly.

"I am not afraid," she answered, bravely.

"You should be, for death is near."

"Death!"

"The time is past for bandying words. Alive you are hateful to me. Your death will give me fortune, freedom and I will grasp it."

"Still I do not fear," she answered, her gaze

fixed unwaveringly upon his darkened face, with its wild, bloodshot eyes. "I shall not be the first woman who met her death at the hands of a pitiful coward."

"Silence!" thundered Haynes, furiously.

"A cur! A blackleg!" proceeded Queenie, with scathing emphasis.

With a howl of rage, Haynes darted toward her and caught her roughly by the shoulders.

"Help me, Mark!" he shrieked. "Throw her on the altar."

Blackwood came forward.

"Man! what are you going to do?" he asked in low, tense tones.

"Show her how the Hindoos burn their women. In a moment the fire will rise and consume her."

With all his dormant instinct of manhood aroused, Mark Blackwood swung Queenie behind him. Then he faced defiantly the man who had so long been his master.

"No, I'm damned if it shall!" he cried, sternly and emphatically.

Haynes looked at him in mingled anger and amazement.

"You defy me."

But the slave had broken his shackles forever.

"You're not a man! You're a fiend! Before I'll stand by and witness such a barbarous deed, I'll die myself."

"Ah!" breathed Queenie, gratefully. "Heaven has sent me a protector!"

"Come, Miss Carruthers," said Mark, "I will take you from this place."

"The doors are locked," returned Queenie.

"But the keys are here," producing them from his pocket.

"Do you think I will permit you to use them?" yelled Haynes.

As he spoke, he drew a pistol, leveled it and fired.

With a cry, Mark Blackwood threw up his arms and fell, face downward, shot through the heart.

His cry was echoed by Queenie. Her only defender was gone.

The next moment she was seized, flung upon the faggot-laden altar, and the chains adjusted so that she could not extricate herself.

"In a few minutes," said Haynes, with a derisive laugh, "my White Queen will be ashes, and the inheritance mine!"

He picked up the keys where they had fallen, unlocked one of the doors and left the temple.

"Rodney! Rodney!" pleaded Queenie, with ashen, quivering lips. "You cannot be in earnest. Think to what you are condemning me! Pity! Pity!"

There was no answer. She was alone, doomed to a horrible death.

She twisted her head to obtain one last look at the man she loved. But the trapeze was empty. David was not there. Oh! could not his eyes see, his heart guess her peril!

There was a roaring sound beneath her and little

tongues of flame began to lick the faggots. It was the time for the lighting of the pyre.

Queenie tried to pray, but her lips refused to form the words.

Then, as she closed her eyes and gave herself up for lost, there was a loud crash. The lower part of the idol fell outward, and David Engleheart dashed through the opening. He leaped down beside the altar, unloosened the chains, and snatched Queenie from the pyre, just as the whole mass of faggots burst forth into a blaze.

The suttee had been cheated of its victim!

From his lofty perch upon the trapeze David had witnessed the cowardly assault upon Queenie. To the boundless surprise of the crowd of spectators, he slid down the rope to the ground, and rushed frantically to the doors of the temple. These of course he found locked. Then he remembered that there was a way to reach the interior of the idol, and a spring which would remove a portion of it, and give him access to the temple. Fortunately all worked well, and he arrived just in the nick of time to save the lovely girl who was more to him, far more, than life itself.

. . . . . .

Rodney Haynes was apprehended the next day, but he did not suffer, at least upon this earth, the punishment his crimes so richly deserved. He escaped that by means of the poison with which he had provided himself for just such an emergency.

Hilda Corrode is in London, Queenie's agent to rescue and provide respectable employment for the

unfortunate women with which the great metropolis teems. In her work, she is assisted by the girl who was once known as Maudie de Freer. Purified by suffering, Hilda no longer aspires after the unattainable, but is peaceful and contented in the good she is doing, and in the affection and companionship of her little daughter.

David and Queenie are married. Mr. Fuller gave the bride away. They have purchased a beautiful estate in that most beautiful of all counties, Devonshire.

Mrs. Jones lives with him. She has abandoned traveling with the circus, but she still delights in reminiscences of when she rode barebacked before the Prince of Wales. Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Blythe, the latter formerly Carrie Jones, are frequent and warmly welcomed visitors.

For our hero and heroine it seems as if the clouds, which so long overshadowed them, had rolled away forever, and the sunlight was clear and strong upon their lives.

Safe in their lovely home, supremely happy in each other's devotion, there are none in all the neighborhood more beloved and respected than they who were once The Star of the Air and The White Queen of the Slack Wire.

[THE END.]

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